

The Power of Persistent Prayer (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] Well, take your Bibles this morning and open them to Luke and find chapter 11 again, Luke chapter 11.

! And I'm going to read verses 5-13. Now, this was our text for last week as well, but we just really got into the first part of what I think this passage has to teach us, and now we're going to get the rest of it.

So, follow along as I read, starting with verse 5 and all the way through verse 13. Now, gee, I'm in the wrong chapter. Actually, I'm in the wrong book.

Yeah, Matthew, Mark, Luke. There it is. Luke chapter 11, starting with verse 5. 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. For a friend of mine has come, come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him.

[1 : 18] And he will answer from within and say, Do not trouble me. The door is now shut. My children are with me in bed. I cannot rise and give to you.

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.

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. For everyone who asks, receives. And he who seeks, finds.

And to him who knocks, it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? For if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?

For if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

[2 : 22] Now, Jesus, of course, is continuing his lesson on prayer. That's what he started at the, really at the beginning of this chapter.

And that's because his disciples needed this lesson on prayer. His disciples then and now. And his disciples then asked him to give a lesson on prayer.

And so that's what Jesus is doing. They said, Lord, teach us how to pray. Now, you remember in the first four verses, Jesus gives a framework for prayer.

Kind of a model prayer. We call it the Lord's Prayer. We spend a lot of time on that. And now he's giving them instructions on how to approach God in prayer.

And that's very important in our understanding about prayer. prayer and Jesus is teaching us. Not only what to pray, but how to approach God in prayer.

[3 : 25] Now, very quickly, let me just review what we talked about last Sunday. We got really one point, one of three points that I think that we can get from this lesson on prayer.

First of all, we said that prayer should be daring. Daring. And that's really putting it mildly. Because here's a man and he has a friend, possibly his next door neighbor.

And he goes to his friend's door and begins to knock on the door. But it's midnight. And everybody is in bed in the house. And he said to him, I guess he finally answered the door, he said to him in verse 5, Friend, lend me three loaves.

Three loaves of bread. And he just keeps on knocking and knocking and asking and asking until he gets it. He will not take no for an answer. Daring prayer.

Verse 8, Jesus says, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, or literally again, his impudence, he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

[4 : 33] And so this is Jesus' lesson on prayer. Prayer should be daring. Daring. Daring in its size, remember. He asked for three loaves.

Three loaves of bread. Daring in its stubbornness. And that really is the main thing we wanted to focus on. Stubborn prayer because of his persistence, Jesus said.

He will rise, his neighbor will rise, and give him as many as he needs. And then in verse 9, Jesus explains the, and applies the point of the parable. He says, So I say to you, he's saying to his disciples, saying to all of us here, here this morning, I say to you, ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you.

Seek and keep on seeking and you will find. Knock and keep on knocking and it will be opened unto you for everyone who keeps on asking keeps on receiving and everyone who keeps on seeking, keeps on finding, and everyone who keeps on knocking, it will be opened to you.

And so this is Jesus' lesson on prayer. Prayer should be daring. Daring in its size. Daring in its stubbornness. And then finally, daring in its sacrifice. I mean, here's a man.

[5 : 49] He's up late. Up in the middle of the night. It's midnight. Trying to get some fresh bread for this friend that has come to him.

And so here he is knocking and knocking and knocking and knocking and he won't let it go. No matter how much criticism may come his way, no matter how late he has to stay up, he is giving it all that he has.

And so it's daring prayer. Daring in its sacrifice. That's what we saw last week. And so now we need to look at a couple of other things that Jesus teaches in this lesson on how to approach God in prayer.

And so here's the second thing. Prayer should be definite. It should be definite. It should be daring. It should also be definite.

And this man said, Friend, lend me three loaves of bread. Not lend me some bread. Or do you have any extra food in the house?

[6 : 58] Or do you have anything to spare? Have anything to eat? It's not anything like that. Nor is it I have a friend who's come and he's a needy friend. What would you suggest I give him? Now this is very definite prayer.

He said, Here is what I need. One, two, three. Three loaves of bread. That's what I want. That's what I need. So it's very definite. Very specific.

And we could learn something about that in prayer. Because let's just admit it, most of the time we pray such general prayers. I don't know about you, but I know I do.

I think I know about you too. We're just kind of general in our praying. So that we never really know for sure if God has answered our prayers. Perhaps you prayed this morning when you got up before you came to church.

And may I say that some of you, maybe most of us, don't even remember exactly what we prayed this morning. And we may have some standard things we pray for and we remember that, but do you remember specifically what you prayed?

[8 : 09] And so if God answered your prayers this morning, would you know it? Would you? Or perhaps you prayed, Lord, if it be your will, save the lost this morning.

That's a pretty safe prayer to pray. Pretty easy prayer. Or Lord, bless our worship service. I mean, how specific is that? It's not specific at all.

It's very general. Or bless so-and-so. Or bless my family. Or bless my life. Bless is probably one of our favorite words in prayer. Although we're really not being very specific, are we?

Very detailed. Bless this. Bless that. And I wonder sometimes, and see if you think about it and see if this is not the case. I wonder sometimes that maybe, just maybe, we don't like to pray really detailed, really specific prayers because we don't want to have to face the difficult question, why am I not getting my prayers answered?

And so if we make our prayers just very general, kind of surface, kind of, you know, kind of just, just non-specific, then we can have some modicum of satisfaction that God's answering our prayers even though we can't really pinpoint any particular thing.

[9 : 26] And so we don't have to face that issue. But now listen, from the parable that Jesus taught here, we understand that general prayers require little time, very little thought, really.

Very little, if any, agony in our prayers. I mean, you don't get up in the middle of the night to pray, Lord, bless so-and-so. You don't get up in the middle of the night and spend hours in the night laboring over prayers that say very generally, heal the sick and save the lost.

And if I have sinned, forgive me. If you've sinned, now get that. I mean, isn't that so typical?

We certainly don't like to be specific about sin, about our sins. Be very detailed about that, do we? Adrian Rogers used to say, we want to sin retail and confess wholesale.

But see, this is Jesus' lesson on prayer. Prayer should be definite. Have you ever had anybody say to you, you know, y'all come see us sometime? Or, let's do lunch someday.

[10:44] I can't tell you how many times I've had people say that to me. Let's just do lunch one day. Or, you know, we're just going to have to have you over for dinner one of these evenings.

I mean, that's pretty, pretty easy to say. Those things are pretty easy to say. There's not really any commitment attached to it. But what if someone came to you and said, you know, listen, I've got in my freezer right now six of the biggest, thickest steaks you've ever seen.

And why don't you and your family come over to our house this Friday night at 6.30 and we'll grill those steaks and have some big baked potatoes and afterwards some homemade apple pie and ice cream and we'll just have a great time together.

Wouldn't you rather have that kind of an invitation? Hallelujah! By the way, I think I'm free this Friday night. By the way. But, see, Jesus is talking about prayer here.

About being very specific. He's talking about how we approach God in prayer. He says, prayer should be daring. He says, prayer should be definite.

[11:51] Very specific. Very detailed. That's something to learn about prayer, isn't it? Let's move to the third thing. We'll spend the rest of our time looking at this.

Prayer should be doubtless. If you don't like that, without doubt. Okay.

No doubting in prayer. And of course, that's taught a number of places in Scripture. I believe it is taught here as well. For the believer and even for the mature believer.

I think that there are two primary aspects of prayer that trouble us. That is, two areas of doubt.

You think about this. Number one, as soon as I mention this, then you're going to say, oh yeah.

Number one, we doubt that our prayers really make any difference.

[13:04] You ever doubt that? That in the bigger picture, in the long run, the overall, prayer really doesn't make much of a difference.

It doesn't really change anything. Second, we doubt, and I know you're going to agree with me on this one. You'll agree with me on the first one too when I explain it.

But second, we doubt that God will say yes to our prayers. Not just that He will answer or hear, but He will say yes.

We doubt that He will say yes to our prayers. Right? Yeah, you know, we're sure that God is well able. We're sure that He's always able to answer our prayers, but we're just not sure that God is willing.

Do you understand? Don't we doubt that? Those are two areas of doubt. I think both of them are addressed in some degree here in this lesson on prayer.

[14:12] We doubt that our prayers really change anything and we doubt that God will say yes to our prayers. Right now, the first one, the first area of doubt, the question as to whether or not our prayers change anything, that pertains to our view of God.

It really does. And the higher your view of God, the more tendency we have to doubt that prayer really, in the long run, really changes anything.

For example, His sovereignty. That's something that I believe in, the sovereignty of God, have a very high view of God, the nature of God, His sovereignty.

I mean, think about it, what the Bible says about it. He's sovereign. He's sovereign over all things. Sovereign over my life, sovereign over my family, my community, my country, this world.

He's sovereign over all the universe. God is sovereign. sovereign. And because He is sovereign, He will bring to pass His perfect plan and His purposes that were made before the foundation of the world in eternity past.

[15:25] Though it's difficult for us to even understand how to define that. He's going to bring all that about. Job said in Job 42, too, I know that you can do all things. He's speaking about God.

I know that you can do all things. Don't you believe that? He says, I know you can do all things that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

It can't change. It can't be changed. It can't be stopped. It can't be altered. No purpose of His can be trashed and replaced by a new plan.

That's what Job said. David said in Psalm 33, verse 11, the counsel of the Lord stands forever. The plans of His heart from generation to generation, which means that what God says is fixed.

I don't mean fixed as in repaired. I mean it's permanent. Cannot be altered. Cannot change. Nothing God says ever changes or is never replaced by something else.

[16:32] Never altered. And primarily because God is never needing any more information. See, our plans change and our ideas change and our knowledge changes because we have new information.

But God is not getting any new information. God is not learning anything. He doesn't have to. He knows all that. There is never anything to be clarified for God.

You know, sometimes our plans change and we change and we go different directions because suddenly what was right there before us that we didn't see before suddenly comes to light.

And so we move a different direction and we change but that's not true of God. He is sovereign. He knows. He knows. He knows.

He doesn't have to learn anything. He already knows about everything and knew about everything even before he made his plan and his purpose. He sees the end from the beginning.

[17:37] His sovereignty. Or how about his immutability? What does that mean? He never changes. And not just that he never changes, he's unchangeable.

He's unchangeable. Or how about his omniscience? I'm not going to name every attribute of God but these are key ones I think that enter into how we approach him in prayer and what we think about prayer.

How about his omniscience? He knows all things. I've already kind of mentioned that. He's not learning things like we are always learning.

He knows all things. Everything. And one more. How about his transcendency? What does that mean? It means that God is above and outside of all things.

That is that he operates outside of all the various contingencies that very definitely rule our lives. I mean we are absolutely ruled from our perspective by contingencies Things that happen and move us in different directions.

[18:52] You encountered a number of contingencies just so you could be here in church this morning. Number one, your presence here, your attendance here was contingent upon your alarm clock working this morning.

and then if it did work that you didn't hit the sleep button too many times. Your presence here is contingent upon your electricity working at your house so that you could do the things that are required to prepare yourself to come.

Shave your face and blow dry your hair and the curlers and all those other things that we think we must do or we can't come to church. So if the power goes out man we are just going to have to skip church today.

We can't go that is a contingent. You don't think about these things. You are not necessarily planning for all the other contingencies that rule our lives and ruled your life so that you could be here this morning.

It was contingent upon your car starting this morning. And not only that contingent that you didn't have a flat on the way here. contingent upon other cars on the road doing what they are supposed to do so you could be here safely today.

[20:04] And we can mention and think of thousands and thousands of contingencies that we are servants to and the direction of our life directions of our lives are dependent upon.

That is who we are. But God is above all those and beyond all those completely outside all the contingencies of this world.

Isaiah 46 and verse 9 For I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like me declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet done saying my counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure.

Indeed I have spoken it I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it I will also do it. That's who God is. And we say man that's fantastic it's wonderful.

Well what's the point concerning prayer? Well the point is this all of these amazing realities about the nature of God all of those things bring to our minds a question about prayer.

[21:29] That is how do our prayers even matter in light of that? Who God is His sovereignty and all that.

In fact that's one of the accusations leveled by the by those those critics of reformed theology by the way. You know they say you know those of you who have a strong view of the sovereignty of God

well that just takes all the heart and passion out of your prayer line.

That's what they accuse us of. And my answer to that is they're right most of the time sadly because there is a real danger for those who have a high view of the nature of God the sovereignty of God there is a danger to think that prayer even especially prayer for the lost to be saved to think that it's a waste of time.

What will be will be. Those who have been chosen from the foundation of the world are going to be saved so why pray for them? There's a real danger.

and so we you know we sometimes approach God we say God I'm sorry you know to come to you now with my little petty things and I won't take very much time because I know that you have everything worked out you know what will be will be I mean God you know you've got it all worked out to the fifth degree you know all the way to the end from beginning to end and even the fact that I was born God and even the fact that I'm here praying right now you you already knew that was going to happen you know because you have all that worked out it's all in the plan you see the danger of that of that kind of thinking it is to doubt that prayer really changes anything and yet at the very least

[23 : 44] Jesus commands us to pray does he not and Jesus instructs us on how to pray that's what we've been studying for the last several Sundays over a month of Sundays and Jesus as we saw last week even challenges us encourages us to beg and plead with God in prayer that's what we've been learning about and so we then can plead with God that he would save a certain person that he would heal someone that he would provide a need for someone and even change our nation anything anything we can plead and not doubt that's what we are told to do and why well here's why because God has not only ordained the end he has ordained the means to the end and we're part of the means to the end and specifically our prayers prayer is a huge means to the end

God's end his foreordained goal for all things and somehow our prayers work into all of that can you think of anything more wonderful than that that is if you get to thinking about it that God would use me me absolutely totally ignorant of the future I don't know anything about the future but that God would use me to be a means by which he achieves his eternal plans incredible and on top of that to bless me for it and reward me forever as one theologian put it prayer is the means by which God's infinite wisdom infinite power and perfect purpose are brought together to accomplish his will so pray and don't doubt that prayer matters that prayer at least from our perspective changes things it's part of God's plan part of his purpose there's another area of doubt though one that we're probably more readily in agreement with and have experienced ourselves and that is we doubt that God will say yes to our prayers there's that nagging doubt it's not a doubt as to whether he's able I mean you know we don't at least not consciously we don't doubt that God is able to do anything abundantly above all that we ask or think we don't have those kind of doubts our doubt is that God is willing you know so that's how we often pray say if you will you know if it's your will God there's anything wrong with praying that and certainly we want to pray and must pray within the will of God but we're not really sure he's willing and this is a tough issue isn't it because we've all had prayers seemingly go unanswered haven't you and we have had many of our prayers you know where God God's answer is seemingly no and I guess I would say that we're kind of okay with that I mean we've kind of resigned ourselves to that reality

God doesn't always answer our prayers or he doesn't always answer yes and we're kind of resigned to that until we read this passage here in Luke 11 where Jesus said ask and you will receive what do you do with that seek and you will find knock and it will be open to no qualification everyone who asks receives everyone who seeks finds everyone who knocks it will be open man that's just so absolute and the bottom line here is this Jesus tells us to expect God always to answer our prayers and not to doubt it see listen Jesus makes no qualification here no qualification about this promise that God will answer our prayers except perhaps that we must ask and seek and knock and that's not really a qualification

I mean certainly we must pray before God can answer anything it's not really a qualification but the unqualified promise is according to our Father Heavenly Father's goodness he answers all our prayers all of them none of your prayers will ever be unanswered you say well yeah sometimes the answer is no well that's a cop out you don't get that from the passage he always answers yes yes that can't be so you doubt it don't you you doubt it well let's just look at the illustration Jesus gives verse 11 so he's given us a parable to teach us about persistence in prayer and now here's a kind of a illustration sort of a parable to teach us about not doubting

[29 : 51] God in prayer the promise that he answers prayer verse 11 if a son asks for bread from any father among you will he give him a stone some of you in your versions you don't have that part of the verse that's okay it appears in the King James the new King James rest of it you'll have or if he asks for a fish will he give him a serpent instead of a fish or if he asks for an egg will he offer him a scorpion that's strange isn't it it's absurd I mean when you look at it it's absurd the answer is no absolutely no and that's the expected answer no father among you us would do that to his son or his daughter we wouldn't do that and the point of the illustration is this the father doesn't give bad gifts to his children right verse 13 if you then being evil that is sinful sinners imperfect if you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your heavenly father stop right there I know there's more to it we'll get to that in a minute but now listen see the point of the illustration be real careful about parables and illustrations the point of the illustration is not you know some difference between bread and stones and fish and serpents and eggs and scorpions and some hidden deeper meaning behind all of these various elements of the illustration see this is the thing that we do quite often we try to make too much of all the details of an illustration particular items are not the important thing now the absurdity of a father giving a scorpion instead of an egg that is part of the problem part of the point but the point really is this that even sinful fathers answer the requests of their children with good things that's the point of the illustration always answer with good things as opposed to bad things that would harm like a scorpion and if this is true of earthly fathers it is by and large there are exceptions of course if it's true of earthly fathers it's infinitely more true of our heavenly father and let me point out something else here there is no promise here that the father earthly or heavenly will give his son bread just because he asked for it or an egg or a fish you don't have followed after this your father will your heavenly father will give you bread and fish and egg that's not the promise the promise is that the father will always answer the request with a good gift that's the point of the illustration always always always he will answer your request with a good gift the very thing you need and Jesus says God always is answering your prayers yes he's always answering yes but it's for your good Calvin said and I like this quote God does not answer our prayers as we pray them but as we would pray them if we were wiser Adrian Rogers put a little twist to it he said God only gives us what we would want if we had enough sense to want it he's still

answering with a good gift he's still answering yes if we were just wiser we would ask for the very thing he gives us and not just wiser in the temporal sense that is in the here and now you know we would ask for things that would be good for us here but wiser even in the eternal sense because this is not all there is and we're going on into eternity and much of what is happening here carries over there in many respects and our answers to prayer God gives us sometimes there and we ought to ask it would be good if we could always ask being wise about even eternity the things that really matter why don't you take Joseph as an example remember Joseph in the Old Testament in Genesis chapter 37 and verse 4 the Bible says that when Joseph's brothers saw that their father that would be Jacob loved him more than all his brothers they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him you kind of know the story about that so there was disharmony in the family all the brothers hated their brother

Joseph and I'm sure that Jacob their father prayed many times for harmony within the family right I mean that just would be a given he used to pray that his sons would get along with his other son Joseph and there would be harmony and unity in the family surely Jacob prayed for that many times did God answer yes to that kind of a prayer well absolutely absolutely he did I'm not sure if I remember that part of the story well he did God always answers yes when his children pray this is the point God always gives good gifts to his children though it took a while for Jacob to see it for it to happen I mean first of all God had Joseph's brothers attempt to kill him and then God had them

throw Joseph into a pit and then God had them sell Joseph into slavery and then God had Joseph taken into Egypt and there long story short he was falsely accused by his master and thrown into prison under sentence of death and then God made a famine come to the land and kill thousands and thousands of people and then God elevated Joseph to a place of high position within Egypt second only I believe to Pharaoh himself and to do that just in time for Joseph's brothers to come into Egypt seeking aid from the famine and then amazing after all that trouble terrible trouble in Genesis chapter 50 God brings Joseph and his brothers together in harmony and they're weeping and I think hugging one another and so forth isn't that amazing God always answers yes when his children pray it may not be the yes you were looking for and it may not be yes when you were wanting it to be yes and it may not be the answer

that you always see they remain hidden and unseen but

God has answered and given a good gift and it may not even be revealed until much much later may not even be revealed until glory do you doubt that by the way it is interesting that Luke adds something here that Matthew in Matthew 7 11 Matthew's account of this same teaching Matthew doesn't add this but Luke does Luke says how much more will your heavenly father give the holy spirit to those who ask him what does that mean well the short explanation is simply means that God has given the holy spirit to indwell the believer and to be the source of all goodness and all blessing to the believer so we ask for the gift and God gives us the giver that's even better so prayer should be doubtless never doubt never doubt that your prayers change things that your prayers matter God has ordained that we be part of the means to his ends his eternal purposes so pray pray and never doubt that

[38 : 51] God will say yes to your prayers never doubt that the answer is always yes it's always yes it's just not always the yes we were looking for and it's the yes but it's the yes we need and it's the yes that is good for us do you doubt that I think we do and it will always be the yes that fits in to God's eternal purpose but the answer is always yes always yes God is going to answer your prayer as if you would have prayed it knowing what he knows think about that get your brain around that let me say it again God is going to answer your prayer just as if you would have prayed it if you know what he knows if you knew what he knows and add to that and if you were as good as he is you know what he

Thank you.