

The Power of Persistent Prayer (Part I)

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Date: 18 May 2014

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] Let's open your Bibles this morning to our passage, Luke chapter 11, and I'll begin reading with verse 5.

! We continue to work our way through this wonderful gospel, gospel according to Luke. Luke, we took a little break from it last week to honor our mothers and to preach a message related to that, and now we need to get back to Luke.

Luke 11, a couple of weeks ago, I finished a series of sermons, as you know, on the first four verses of this chapter entitled Prayer 101. And we really took several weeks there to take a deep excursion.

One of the most famous prayers in all of the Bible, certainly in the New Testament. And though it's really not a prayer at all, it's actually a model for praying, the Lord's Prayer we call it.

And now we're ready to move on from there, and we discover that the subject is still prayer. In fact, we might even make the case, and I think make it quite well, in fact I hope to make the case, this morning and next Sunday.

[1 : 16] We'll take a couple of weeks on this. Make the case that this is even deeper into an area of prayer that we would call intercessory prayer.

Going really beyond just the praying for our own needs, though I think the principles that Jesus teaches here applies there as well. But going beyond that to praying for the needs of others.

So let me go ahead and read the text, Luke 11, starting with verse 5. And he said to them, Verse 6. 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?

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? So there you have it.

[3 : 08] There's the passage for this morning and really for next Sunday too. And I would say to you here at the beginning that the key word in this passage, Therefore, I think the key to understanding Jesus' teaching point on the subject of prayer is found in verse 8.

So let me read that again and let's see this key word and the key to understanding the meaning of the teaching here. In verse 8 again, he said, If you have an NIV, and I know that some of you do use the NIV, you will find there the word boldness.

And that somewhat gives us the idea, though it's really stronger than that. In fact, really, the word is much more alarming than just simple boldness.

The ESV, and I know there are just a few of you who have the English Standard Version, and I would have to say that it really captures, I think, the true meaning. And they use the word impudence, of all words.

Impudence. Impudence. And I say to you that that perhaps is the best English word that would capture for us the meaning, the full meaning of the word that Luke used here in Luke 11 and verse 8.

[4 : 56] Impudence. Now, how in the world could that word, impudence, have anything to do with prayer? In fact, how could it have anything to do with our relationship with God in whatever sense of the meaning of that?

Let's just think about that word. I'm talking about the English word. Since it captures the best that we can in our English language, captures the meaning of the original Greek word here, let's think about the meaning of that word.

The root of the word impudence, the root word there, comes from the Latin, and it is the word pudens, or pudens, if you want to pronounce it that way.

And it means modesty. That's interesting. In fact, I read the other day that in early Christianity, parents often named their children.

It was very common for children to be named pudens, meaning modesty, or in some cases bashfulness, or shamefacedness.

[6:06] And so that's the root of that word impudence. And so when you add the prefix, the negative prefix, on the front of the word, then you have a word that means shamelessness.

Shamelessness. Now that's as close as we can get to the meaning of the Greek word that's used here in verse 8. A word, by the way, that only appears one time in all of the New Testament.

And this gets as close to it. It means shamelessness. Which describes someone who, you know, kind of crosses the boundaries of appropriate social interaction with people.

That would be maybe a more complicated definition of the word. To make it more understandable to us, we might say, well, the nerve of that guy. That's the idea here.

Or, and here's an old expression, the gall of that guy, whatever that word means. Or maybe a more contemporary reaction would be, how tacky.

[7:07] How tacky that guy is. I mean, have you no shame. That's the idea. And so, that's what we're to understand from this parable, this illustration that Jesus uses, that he uses to give us a lesson on prayer.

Because here's a man who wakes up his neighbor at midnight. He wakes up, effectively, the entire family in the middle of the night, knocking and knocking and knocking at the door just to ask for some bread.

And we would say, the gall of that guy. Just to get some bread. And again, we would mean that he has broken all of the rules normally accepted social behavior by doing such a thing.

You just don't do that. How tacky that is. Now, let's quickly remember that Jesus is teaching a lesson on what subject?

Prayer. Prayer. He's teaching on prayer. And so, this is a parable. A parable that he uses, as Jesus often did, to help fortify his teaching, to help ground the teaching so that we would understand it and know how it would apply to our lives.

[8:19] And so, what is he saying, essentially? He is saying, this is how you should approach God in prayer. Now, this is kind of strange to us.

But this is what Jesus is saying. This is how you should approach God in prayer. Do you have a need? Or, again, more to the context of this point of teaching, does someone you know, a friend of yours or someone you know, have a big need?

A need in his life. A need in her life. Then, here is how you should approach God in prayer. Shamelessly. Persistently.

Even impersonantly. Or, as I've said, impudently. And the idea is you must not be reluctant.

You must not ever, ever even feel ashamed to come to the Lord with a request in prayer. You should never, ever think that somehow you are bothering God.

[9:23] Or that you're bringing to Him some petty thing. Or, you know, you don't want to bother God with petty troubles. You know, pestering Him. You know, just constantly coming to Him.

Making yourself some kind of a nuisance. That's the idea here. It's kind of like saying, Well, God, here I am again. Sorry. You ever felt like that in prayer?

You know, keep coming back with the same issue, same problem, same need, and you feel a little ashamed about it. And the idea here is Jesus saying, No, no. Don't ever feel that way.

You are to ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened unto you. It's the power of persistent prayer.

Prayer. And it's an approach to prayer that I'm afraid to admit that most of us, really all of us, to some extent, know nothing about. And so let's learn what Jesus says about that.

[10:22] And we'll, again, take a couple of Sundays to do it. First of all, and this will be our focus this morning, cannot read the parable and then attach that, of course, to the actual teaching and not understand that prayer is something daring.

Prayer is daring. It's to be daring. And so let's just kind of walk through this parable. Verse 5, Which of you shall have a friend and go to him at midnight?

Now let's stop right there. And so it's pretty easy to see this, to picture this, visualize this. Here's a man. And he has a friend, possibly his next door neighbor. And he goes to his friend's door and begins knocking on the door.

But it's midnight. Middle of the night. Everyone is in bed. Now why would this guy be knocking on his neighbor's door in the middle of the night? Why would he be doing that?

Is there some kind of an emergency? Maybe his wife is pregnant and needs some help immediately. Or maybe someone in his family is injured and needs some medical attention. Or possibly, you know, someone even dying.

[11:37] Some great need, some emergency. Is that what it is? Why is he knocking at the door at midnight? Well, verse 5 tells us. He says to him, Friend, lend me three loaves or three loaves of bread.

Is that it? I mean, that's what he wants? Waking up his neighbor and possibly his neighbor's family just to get some bread.

I mean, you can picture it and we do get this from the parable that he is constantly banging on his friend's door in the middle of the night asking for some bread. Why?

Verse 6, For a friend of mine has come to me on his journey and I have nothing to set before him. That's why he's knocking on his friend's door in the middle of the night.

Now, by the way, I just want to go on record. If you come to my house at midnight and knock on the door just to get some bread for some unexpected guests, I might give you the bread, but I might give you a piece of my mind as well.

[12:43] So I recommend that you not do that. And I say that really to highlight that, you know, this is something strange to us. Now, the parable, as Jesus told us, was strange to his disciples too but for a completely different reason.

It's strange to us because culturally this just, I mean, just generally wouldn't happen. We wouldn't expect this kind of happening. It would be inappropriate, really, in our culture.

Even if you were born and raised in the deep south. Because this takes southern hospitality to a level that has not ever even been thought of in our country. You need to understand that in the Middle Eastern culture of Jesus' day and really to a large extent still today, when someone showed up at your home, no matter what time it was, you were honor bound not only to house them, at least for a night, but you were to also provide for them every need that they had.

In fact, it was so strong, the custom was so strong that when a visitor, even if it was a total stranger, showed up in your home, you were to generously provide for them all of their needs, even if necessary, to the exclusion of your own family.

It was just a cultural thing. And so, just know this, that when Jesus mentions that this guy didn't have any bread to give his unexpected friends or unexpected guests, when Jesus mentioned that, then his disciples were immediately aghast.

[14:13] I mean, this was terrible. This was unheard of. This is unthinkable that this kind of thing should happen. And so, what does this guy do?

Well, he can't turn his guests away just because he doesn't have any food. That would be unforgivable. He would be under such shame. And, of course, he couldn't run down to the local 24-7, you know, convenience store or Walmart or anything like that.

They certainly didn't have anything like that in those days. And so, what does he do? He says, well, I've got a friend, a couple doors down, or maybe he's my next door neighbor, and I'll go ask him for some food.

I know it's midnight, but I don't have any choice. I have to have three loaves of bread for my friend, so he goes next door and he knocks on the door and from inside, who is it?

Hey, Bill, it's me, Don, your next door neighbor. What do you want? Hey, Bill, Bill, I'm sorry, but I need some bread.

[15:18] I've got some unexpected guests. I need three loaves of bread. Now, I said here at the beginning that this was a lesson on prayer and that prayer should be daring and so this is, this is the lesson.

This is the parable. Daring prayer. It is, first of all, daring in its size. The size of prayer.

What did he ask for? Well, it's just plain right from the text and even plain in the original text as well that he's asking for bread. Three loaves of bread.

Now, that may not seem like much to us. I mean, you know, relatively speaking, bread is pretty inexpensive, right? I know the price is going up, but still, bread's not that big of a deal and three loaves of bread, okay, maybe most of us have that much frozen in our freezer.

So, what's the big deal? Well, in Jesus' day, one loaf of bread represented the equivalent of a day's worth of provision of food.

[16:34] A day's worth. One loaf, one day's provision. And so, this man is asking for how many? Three. Three loaves. The equivalent of three days' provision.

And so, the idea in the parable is that this is a big request. Remember, Jesus is teaching on prayer. So, we want to attach many of the basic elements of the parable to the subject of prayer.

So, he's making a big request. See, listen, we need to make big requests of God. Ask God for big things.

And do we dare do that? And not just dare ask him for a big thing, but to continue to ask him for something big. It's, it really is such an evidence of the strength of our faith, the level of our faith.

The Bible says in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 20, God is able to do, you know this verse, don't you? He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above, I mean, you're stacking all those adverbs, above all.

[17:50] that we ask or think according to the power that works in us. He's able. Matthew 9, 27 tells us about a couple of guys who had a big, big, big request of Jesus.

They were both blind. That's a pretty big, big problem, big need. And the Bible says that they cried out to Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us.

That is, heal us. We're blind. And when Jesus, the Bible goes on to say, when Jesus had come into the house, the blind men came to him.

So they came again. And I think that is they kept coming to him. And Jesus said to them, do you believe that I am able to do this?

What did they say? Yes, Lord. That was their response. Yes, Lord. And so he touched their eyes, saying, according to your faith, be it unto you.

[18:48] See, here's my point. I wonder, I wonder, do we actually insult God with our little prayers? Little things.

Several years ago, I was sitting in my dentist's chair, getting ready to have a root canal. Yuck. And as I was sitting there, waiting for him to come in and start torturing me, I looked up and saw a plaque on the wall just in front of me.

And it had a Bible verse inscribed on it. And it was Psalm 81, verse 10, where the Bible says, Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it. Perfect. Perfect for a dentist, don't you think?

But this is the idea here. Same lesson from the Old Testament. Open wide thy mouth. Open wide. Big.

And God said, I will fill it. I will fill it. This is a promise from God. Prayer should be daring. Daring.

[19:55] Daring in its size. But also, daring in its, and we have a little problem with this, but this is what Jesus is teaching, it's daring in its stubbornness.

It's really difficult for us to put those two words together. In a sentence. To have any kind of, make any kind of association between the word prayer and stubbornness.

But understand from the parable that this was more than just a light knock at the door. A whole lot more than just some little polite tap on the front door.

You know. Well, the idea is so loud, you know, it wakes up the entire neighborhood. Who is it?

From inside, you know. Again, Bill, it's me, Don. You know, your next door neighbor. And he says, what do you want?

[20:57] Well, well, Bill, I've had some unexpected guests and I need some bread. Would you lend me three loaves of bread? No. Go away.

Are you crazy? Again at the door. From inside, who is it? Well, Bill, it's me again.

I'm still here and I'm sorry but I've got to have that bread. Will you lend me three loaves of bread? No, I said. It's midnight for crying out loud.

My kids are asleep. You wake up the baby and you're going to have to answer to my wife. Go home. Again at the front door.

Who is it? Bill. You still here? Bill, Bill, you don't understand. My friends are here. They're hungry. I've got to have that bread.

[21:56] You've got to give me three loaves of bread. I won't do it. I said, no, go home. Go away. Don't bother me tonight. I've got to have that bread.

Open up the door. Give me three loaves of bread. I've got to have it right now. And his friend finally says, all right then. Wake up the whole neighborhood.

Here you are. Three loaves of bread. Now get out of here. That's the idea behind this parable. Verse 8.

Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence. And again, it's the word impudence. I mean, he's gone way beyond what's appropriate, socially appropriate, and common etiquette and courtesy.

He's throwing all that out the window. His impudence. Because of his impudence, he will rise and give him as many as he needs. Can you believe it?

[23 : 01] This is a lesson on prayer. This is how we're to approach God in prayer. Stubborn prayer. Stubborn.

Prayer that will not let go. Prayer that will not take no for an answer. And most of us are thinking, man, that's just, that's obnoxious. I mean, Jesus couldn't be meaning this.

I mean, this is, this is even irreverent to pray this way. How dare it. But, Jesus is teaching the lesson on prayer.

And he says in the very next verse, in verse 9, he says, so I say to you. So he tells this story, this parable. And he says, this is what I say to you. Ask.

By the way, grammatically speaking, it's a verb of continuous action. He's saying, ask and keep on asking and ask and ask and ask and it will be given to you.

[24 : 13] Seek. Again, literally seek and keep on seeking and seeking and seeking and seeking and you will find knock and keep on knocking and knocking and knocking and it will be open to you.

Verse 10, for everyone who literally keeps on asking, keeps on receiving and he who keeps on seeking, keeps on finding and to him who keeps on knocking, it will be open.

Do we know anything about that kind of prayer? You remember the story about Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis chapter 32?

It may not be as familiar a story from the Old Testament as many of the others are, but I need to remind you a little bit about it. Remember Jacob wrestles, the Bible says, wrestles with a man all night.

Later on in the passage, we understand that there's no mere man, this is the Lord himself. So Jacob is wrestling with Yahweh all night and finally God says, now get this, let me go, says Jacob, as if he could not get loose.

[25 : 32] Let me go and then he, the Bible says he touches his hip socket, his hip socket out of joint, cripples it. Let me go.

And how does Jacob respond? He says, I will not let you go until you bless me. This is such an illustration of prayer, the kind of prayer that Jesus is teaching.

I will not let you go until you bless me and God does bless him. Gives him a new name, gives him the name Israel, his covenant name. And it, of course, signifies not only the covenant but God's purpose for Jacob, now Israel and his people because God says, for you have struggled with God. You've struggled with God and have prevailed. He said. This is amazing. Now, when I ask you something, do you really think that a mortal man could wrestle with God all night and God say, let me go?

I mean, is that even even plausible? Well, that fight was fixed. God didn't want Jacob to let him go.

[26 : 55] Just as he does not want us to let God go in prayer. He wanted to let him go. He wanted to answer Jacob's request. He wanted to bless Jacob and he did bless him.

He wanted Jacob to be stubborn. Stubborn in his prayers. It's so much a part of true faith, real faith. As a matter of fact, if you want to, you can look over at Hebrews chapter 11 and this is interesting.

Hebrews 11 and verse 21 and you know Hebrews 11 is the list of the faithful, famous faithful.

God's hall of faith. And you get on down to verse 21 and we have this mention of Jacob. Just a little, little, little blurb about Jacob and in verse 21, by faith, speaking of Jacob, it's faith.

when he was dying, blessed each of his sons of Joseph and worshipped and then that last part, leaning on the top of his staff.

[28 : 01] that's referenced back to this, this fight or wrestling he had with God where he would not let go of God.

He had faith. He was persistent in his request. God crippled him. He was crippled the rest of his life. This is a testimony of his faith.

This kind of praying, persistent praying, even impudent praying, is faith. God calls it faith.

I want you to look at another example in Luke chapter 18. In Luke 18 and really the first verse there, another parable that Jesus tells, again, teaching this same principle about prayer.

Then he spoke a parable to them that men always ought to pray and not lose heart. So what's the point of the parable even before we read it?

[29 : 24] That we ought to be persistent in prayer. Pray in faith, not lose heart, not faint. King James puts it. And here's the parable.

There was a certain city, in a certain city, a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. And there was a widow in that city and she came to him, literally kept coming to him, saying, get justice for me from my adversary.

And he would not for a while, but afterward he said within himself, though I do not fear God nor regard man, I have a regard for God or man. Yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her lest by her continual coming she weary me.

That's the parable. Same idea as the parable we have in Luke 11. And then Jesus goes on to say, hear what the unjust judge said.

And shall God not avenge his own elect who will cry out day and night to him though he bears long with them? Crying day and night.

[30 : 35] I tell you that he will avenge them speedily nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he finally, will he really find faith on the earth? What kind of faith?

This kind of faith. In the context, it's not just faith in a general sense, will he find faithful people? Will he find saved people? He's talking about this kind of faith in prayer.

That cries out to God day and night. Persistent prayer. And so you see, prayer should be daring. It's daring in its size. Daring in its stubbornness.

Then one more, very quickly, daring in its sacrifice. Sacrifice. You get that from the parable as well. Here's a man up late.

Up late, it's midnight. Trying to get some bread for his friend. Sacrifice. And here he is.

[31 : 40] He's knocking and knocking and knocking and knocking and dogs are barking and lights are coming on in the neighbor's house and neighbors are looking out scowling through their window.

Maybe some of them even shouting at him. But he's going to go on without any care of that. This is sacrificial prayer.

Most of us don't know anything about that kind of persistence. Persistence in prayer. perhaps some of you do.

I think some of you do. For example, agonizing in prayer over a son who's lost. Rejecting God, pursuing a road to destruction.

You agonize in prayer for him. Or for a daughter, too. or, as it were, storming the halls of heaven for someone who has an incurable disease.

[32 : 50] Someone who's terminally ill. Or pleading with God in your own behalf to restore your fellowship with him.

Maybe you've been going through a dry, dry time. No intimacy. No fellowship. You agonize in prayer over restored fellowship with God.

And maybe, perhaps, you don't even know what it is exactly. And so, you sacrifice sleep, sacrifice hunger, health, time, maybe even risk being thought of as some kind of fanatic.

But Jesus teaches us to pray daring prayers. Daring in their size. Daring in stubbornness.

Daring in sacrifice. Prayers that will not let go. Prayers that will not take no for an answer. That's what Jesus says.

[34 : 07] This is how he says to approach God in prayer. Power persistent prayer. Thank you.