

Message #52

Luke 11:5-10

Someone has wisely observed concerning the subject of prayer:

- 1) The church has many organizers, but few agonizers.
- 2) The church has many who pay, but few who pray.
- 3) The church has many resters, but few wrestlers.
- 4) The church has many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding.
- 5) Those who are not praying are those who are playing.
- 6) One key secret of praying is to pray in secret.
- 7) The worldly Christian stops praying and the praying Christian stops worldliness.
- 8) Financial offerings may build a church, but prayer offerings give power to the church.

One critical difference between most modern churches and the early church is its focus on prayer. When it comes to the matter of effective praying, never have so many in the church left so much to so few.

The Apostles of Jesus Christ became powerful men of God who did a powerful work for God. The foundation of every New Testament church is built upon the Apostolic ministry (Eph. 2:20). It is clear that one of the central ingredients that made them so impacting was their focus on prayer. They took prayer very seriously.

Prayer was not easy for them, but they learned its importance. In the process of time, they became powerful and impacting men of God. One reason why they became powerful men of prayer is that they literally asked Christ to “teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

These disciples had the right heart for prayer and they knew its importance and they knew they needed help in their own prayer life, so they asked the Lord to teach them and help them. They wanted to have the same focus on prayer that Jesus had.

Last time we saw that Christ taught His disciples to focus on the majestic sovereign holiness and greatness of God and His Program. This was an important lesson for them to learn. They needed to realize they are talking to a High, Holy, Heavenly Father who has a Kingdom program that He will implement.

Now as Christ continues His instruction on prayer, He wanted His disciples to understand this point:

GOD WILL DEFINITELY ANSWER THE PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE WHO PERSISTENTLY PRAY.

Jesus Christ wanted His disciples to know the importance of a persistent prayer life. Persistent prayer life will pay off. This is the same kind of prayer focus that Paul was after for the New Testament Church when he said, “pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17).

Jesus Christ Himself teaches that if His people want answers to prayer and want blessings of God, they must persistently and continually pray. There are times when one prayer sent sailing to heaven is not enough. There must be consistency and continual prayer.

To drive this point home, Jesus gives two prayer instructions:

PRAYER INSTRUCTION #1 – The illustration of a persistent friend. **11:5-8**

This is a very interesting illustration that teaches us much about prayer and it stretches a friendship to the maximum level. There are two parts to this illustration:

Part #1 - The request of the friend. **11:5-6**

What is described here by Jesus is some midnight emergency in which a friend needed three loaves of bread.

Often times in the Middle East, because of the hot sun, people would travel at night when it was cooler. This was especially true if you had a good number traveling together because there was protection in numbers.

During the time when Jesus was on earth, there weren't any 24-hour convenience stores or grocery stores that were open. There were not any bakeries open all night for people to buy bread. In fact, all market business was conducted during the day at the market place.

Hospitality was a very sacred duty in the N.T. world. Housing people and giving them something to eat and a place to stay was a Biblical responsibility. It apparently was such a serious responsibility that the writer of Hebrews exhorted people not to forget to entertain strangers because some had entertained angels unaware (Heb. 13:2).

One of the central parts of being hospitable was providing a meal. Meals were always considered to be a great time of fellowship and an important part of friendship. So Christ uses this historical background to teach the disciples about prayer.

The scenario that Christ describes is that about midnight, a friend arrived at his friend's home, obviously tired and hungry. The clear implication is that this was an unexpected visit and unexpected time. The friend, whose house the man showed up, did not have any food to offer him. So he went to another friend's house to ask him to "lend" him three loaves of bread. Some observations we want to make here:

- 1) This man asking for bread is not asking for himself, but for a friend.
- 2) This man asking for bread is asking a friend, not just some neighbor.
- 3) This man asking for bread is asking his friend from a real need.
- 4) This man asking for bread asks his friend to lend him the bread.

The idea of asking him to lend him the loaves means he would pay him back. In fact, the word “lend” (χρησον) means to lend something to someone with a real need. So if the man borrowed three loaves, he would pay back three loaves.

This was a very legitimate need and it was a very legitimate and honest request. The request for the bread was not even for the one making the request; it was for someone else who had the need. The friend showed up at his house hungry and the man did not have any bread made to give him something to eat.

The literal point that Christ is making about prayer here is that it is perfectly legitimate when we find ourselves in unexpected situations and we cannot meet the need, to take that need to God in prayer.

Whenever we find ourselves facing a legitimate need we cannot possibly meet, it is time for us to pray and take our requests to God. This was a legitimate, honest request and the request was not only for self, but also included someone else.

There will be times in our lives when situations and circumstances occur and we do not have the means in and of ourselves to meet them. Unexpected visitors, medical needs, bills that we were not expecting can put a strain on our emotional and spiritual stability. Jesus says these are the moments you need to pray. These are the moments in which you need to be talking to God.

This is a key lesson He is teaching His own disciples. When they have legitimate needs and find themselves totally helpless to meet those needs, they need to go to God in prayer and ask for His provisions and help. If they do that, they may expect His answers.

Part #2 - The response to the friend. **11:7-8**

The point of these verses is to show that the friend who has been asked for the bread must lend it, no matter what the excuse he may have for not lending it.

Initially, when the friend went and asked his friend for the bread, there were three main excuses the friend potentially could make for not giving him the loaves in the middle of the night.

(Excuse #1) - This is a bother. **11:7a**

It is true waking someone up at midnight to ask if you can borrow three loaves of bread is a bother. The word “bother” is interesting. It is a word that indicates troublesome labor and toil and effort that is fatiguing (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 253-254).

This is like saying I’m totally worn out and too fatigued to help, so quit bothering me. This is like saying leave me alone and go away because I am too tired.

(Excuse #2) - The door is shut. 11:7a

Typically a door was a heavy wooden door which was bolted shut with a huge wooden or iron bolt for protection. Often there were iron rings and a wooden or iron bar was placed through the rings and to open it would require some effort and would make some noise.

There will be times when God will seemingly shut the door of answers to our prayers:

- 1) It may be we are not obeying the word of God and the door will be shut. I John 3:22
- 2) It may be we are not praying with right motives and the door will be shut. James 4:3
- 3) It may be we are not praying with a forgiving heart and the door will be shut. Mark 11:25-26
- 4) It may be we are not dealing with sin and the door will be shut. Ps. 66:18
- 5) It may be we do not have proper marital attitudes and the door will be shut. I Pet. 3:1-7
- 6) It may be we do not have stable faith in God and the door will be shut. James 1:5-7

On the other hand, if these things are in order, then God's door of answers will be open to our prayers and our needs.

(Excuse #3) - We are all in bed. 11:7b

In a typical Jewish home all members of the family slept in the same general area. Most homes did not have several bedrooms and so the family slept in the same general area, kind of like when we pack a family into the motel room.

David Garland said today this would be like a friend who calls you in the middle of the night to say that his wife is in labor and he needs to get her to the hospital but his car won't start. So he asks could he borrow your car and you say, "I'm sorry I left the car keys in the kids' bedroom and I'm afraid I might wake them up" (*Exegetical Commentary on Luke*, p. 466).

Now to get up and open the door would mean there would be a good possibility that you would wake up the whole family. Now if you think about this, there is humorous irony here in the illustration of the Lord.

The guy has already been pounding on the door and carrying on a conversation about three loaves of bread in the middle of the night so more than likely everyone was awake.

We used to travel through the night and the boys would be sound asleep in the back of the car. Every now and then Mary and I would say let's stop and get a milkshake or a burger. Those boys could be out cold, but the moment we pulled into a drive-thru, they were awake and alert and they came to life.

In any case, the excuse was we are all in bed so I cannot get up and give you anything. Now there is no hint that the neighbor did not have the bread to loan; he just didn't want the hassle to get up and open the door and give the bread.

Before we move on, let me ask you a question. Are we this type of friend? Are we the type of friend who always invents excuses for why we can't do something? Why we can't help? That is certainly not the mark of a godly character.

I know some friends I could call right now and tell them I need them and they would drop what they are doing as soon as they could and would be here. Abraham was actually called a “friend of God” (II Chron. 20:7). Friends don’t make excuses; they do things and help when needed.

Friends of God don’t make excuses for not praying, not coming to church, not getting involved. If you ask some people why don’t you come to services or why don’t you get more involved. Well we have a lot going on. All kinds of things and we don’t want to get burned out. Those are not friends of God who make excuses.

In **verse 8** Christ says that even though this “so called friend would not get up and help because of friendship, if the friend kept persisting long enough, he would get up and help because of his persistence and he would give him the bread just to get rid of him.

That word “persistence” (αναδία) is most interesting in Greek. It is a word that literally means “shamelessness or importunity” (*Ibid.*, p. 30). In other words, just because of the annoyance and the disgraceful shame of this, the friend will give him the bread just to get him to go home.

What Jesus was doing here was setting up a great contrast between a very questionable friend who would hardly get out of bed to help and the amazing, almighty God who is ready to help His people.

If a fickle friend would answer the request, how much more would our Holy and Heavenly Father. Christ is instructing and encouraging His disciples that God will answer their prayers. He is not bothered or annoyed or ashamed, but He will answer their prayers for help.

PRAYER INSTRUCTION #2 – The command to persistent prayer. 11:9-10

All of the verbs in **verse 9** are present tense imperative verbs, meaning they are continual commands. Jesus is commanding His disciples to continually pray about needs.

There are three specific commands that Jesus gives to His disciples about prayer:

Command #1 - You need to continually ask (αἰτεῶ). 11:9a, 10a

The first place prayer begins, after acknowledging the greatness and holiness and sovereignty of God, is the asking level. This word means to go to God and ask your requests (*Ibid.*, p. 14). This is the part of prayer that makes specific requests to God. **Verse 10** makes it clear that this is teaching for “everyone” and everyone who continually asks will receive answers.

Now God may not answer the way we want or expect, but He will answer. The answer may be “yes,” it may be “no,” it may be “wait” or it may be “get to work.”

Command #2 - You need to continually seek (ζητεῶ). 11:9b-10b

This is the second level of prayer which places an emphasis on a demanding search. This is more intense than just asking, this is asking out of a very emotional circumstance.

The word means to desire something, strive after something by diligently searching and seeking (*Ibid.*, p. 195). Those who pray like this will “find” answers.

Command #3 - You need to continually knock (κρουω). **11:9c, 10c**

This is the third level and most intense level of prayer. The word “knock” speaks of striking and pounding a door (*Ibid.*, pp. 258-259).

What the Lord is saying is that if you want God to answer prayers, you need to pound on the door of heaven with your prayers. He says I am commanding you to continually pound on the door of heaven with your prayers.

These three verbs describe a constant assault on heaven with prayer. Jesus is teaching His disciples that you need to keep asking, keep seeking and keep knocking. If some friend would answer your request because you kept bothering him with it, how much quicker will the Omnipotent God.

Now **verse 10** says that if someone prays with this kind of intensity about something, God will answer.

This option is open to “everyone,” which means every believer, whether male or female, young or old, regardless of background, social status or economic status. Every believer has the potential to have God open heaven and answer the prayer.

Now let’s face it, most people do not pray with this kind of persistent intensity. Those who do will see answers.

Babe Ruth is known for his incredible ability to hit home runs. What is often overlooked is that he struck out 1,330 times. That almost totals four complete seasons of striking out. But he consistently got into the batter’s box and he swung the bat.

God wants His people consistently and persistently praying.

Let’s say that someone challenges us to play a game called “how far.” Here are the rules: you fill your car up with gas and see how far you can go before you run out of gas. That’s the game. You may run out on the expressway or you may run out in the middle of town. What fun it will be for all of us to share where we were when we ran out of gas. Now if someone said let’s do this, you would say are you crazy? What a ludicrous game.

I’ll tell you one far more ludicrous than this—some people actually play this game in their spiritual lives. Let’s see how far we can go without talking to God. Let’s see how far we can go without prayer. Let’s see how far we can go without refueling our spiritual life. Frankly, we won’t make it too far.