

The Parable of the Friend in Need

5 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.”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Just in case I don't get the message across with the rest of today's message, it's that we are given a great privilege of being able to pray to God. Jesus was a person of prayer. As his followers, so are we. Jesus teaches us about how our Father in heaven always hears us and will always answer us. So be sure to have an active life of prayer for your benefit. And not just for your benefit, but also for the good of others.

Jesus makes this point by means of the Parable of the Friend in Need. Let's review the parable as Jesus taught it. (Please see the text from Luke 11 at the top of this page.)

When we consider what we are told about the life of Jesus, we find that he prayed a lot. Jesus prayed in the early morning. Jesus prayed at the Temple. He prayed in synagogues. He prayed up in the hills. He prayed at Gethsemane. He even prayed on the cross. Jesus prayed for himself and also for others. In Hebrews 7:25 we learn that Jesus prays for us even now.

He [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. Hebrews 7:25

Jesus prays for you. He also prayed for himself. Perhaps the most famous prayer of Jesus is his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. We really see the inner heart of Jesus there, as he prayed he could avoid his suffering and death. But he also prayed that whatever the Father needed to be done for our benefit would be the way things went. We know the rest of the story. He did go headlong into the suffering brought by the assault, flogging, crown of thorns, and the cross and nails. Then he passed through the horrors of hell and physical death. Jesus' last prayer of his earthly life was, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” That prayer was answered three days later with his resurrection into eternal glory.

Jesus tells us that by his suffering, death, and resurrection, we have peace with God, we are invited into the presence of God, and we are even *encouraged* to bring our prayers and

requests to him. As God's children who belong to him through Jesus, God promises to always hear and answer every prayer. We have an open channel to God, and – as we are taught in the Bible – God is love. We have an open channel to God who is love. That is no small matter.

Today's parable is found in Luke 11:5-8. Immediately before the parable, in the first 4 verses of this chapter, Jesus gives us the Lords Prayer. Now, Jesus' Parable of the Friend in Need was told to highlight how such prayer with God works.

In this parable Jesus pictures a village along the lines of Bethlehem where he was born. Imagine 800 people or so living in that place. One of the households receives a guest who arrives at night, long after supper. If you were travelling in those days, you were probably on foot. It would take a long time to get from one village to another. If you run into trouble along the way, you might not get to your destination at the planned time. If you're in the middle of nowhere you can't just stop for the night out in the open. You need to keep going to get to safety. So it is very understandable why a guest could arrive late at night. Upon arrival, the host needed to prepare a meal for the guest. In the case of Jesus' parable, there was no bread in the house. He goes to a neighbor, knocks on the door asking for some bread, and the neighbor refuses to help.

Dr. Ken Bailey was a scholar who lived in the middle east for quite some time and witnessed the customs of the people who lived there. In his book *Poet and Peasant* he explains to us the nature of the need for bread at the midnight hour that Jesus inserts here in this parable. He says ...

... a guest must be served a full loaf or it would be an insult. Enough must be served to give the semblance of a full meal. To entertain a guest at one's house is not only the responsibility of the individual, but of the whole village, even at the unusual hour of midnight. Even if the guest is not hungry, a meal must be set before him. Thus to find bread for the guest at midnight would involve the community, and it would be common knowledge who had recently baked and would have bread. The meal would consist of common dishes, and the bread would be dipped into these dishes and eaten, so that the bread would function as the utensils used to eat the meal.

So, it turns out that the sleepy neighbor is not such a nice guy. He bore the communal responsibility of providing food for the midnight guest. However, he refused his responsibility in favor of staying in bed. However, perhaps because of his friend's persistence and a nagging sense of responsibility, he did get up and get the bread. All's well that ends well.

Jesus says his Father is not like the sleepy neighbor. Rather, God is love. That neighbor was unwilling to help his friend. However, Jesus encourages us to seek what we need from the Lord, because, unlike the sleepy neighbor, the Lord is always waiting and willing to help us in whatever way we need. So Jesus tells us to ask, seek, and knock.

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. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Luke 11:9-10

In his explanation to the introduction to the Lords Prayer, Martin Luther brings out this willingness of God to help us and what that means for our life of prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean?

God would thereby tenderly urge us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father.

Jesus gives us the Lords Prayer. Then he teaches us parables like the Friend in Need to show us how our loving God will always hear and answer us. Great teachers of the Church like Luther confirm the same. So, what is next? That's simple – Pray!

Do you pray? How do you pray? In 1 Thessalonians it says to pray without ceasing. Some think this means that we would always be praying to God throughout the day. I suppose there are some people who can do that. I myself am not good at doing more than thing at a time. I'm not whatchacall a good multitasker. Maybe you aren't either. If I pray while pouring coffee, the cup would probably overflow and make a big mess. I hate to think what would happen if I prayed while slicing cucumbers. I can picture someone praying intently while driving on a busy road. They didn't notice the light changed to red. Perhaps their prayers to get to heaven will be answered sooner than they thought! Praying without ceasing may be dangerous to your health. To understand on a practical level the teaching about praying without ceasing, we have the example in Acts chapter 2. There we are given a glimpse of what they did in the first Christian churches.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:42

What it meant as far as the prayers were concerned, was that they especially participated in the services of morning and evening prayer. Every morning the priests would offer the morning sacrifice on the altar in the temple along with the prayers. The image was that as

the smoke from the sacrifice rose up to heaven, so the prayers of the people accompanied the rising smoke. No matter where you were, at that time of day, you would take time to stop and pray. Everybody prayed the morning prayer. The same kind of thing happened in the evening. There was the sacrifice, the smoke, the temple prayers, and everyone else taking time to pray. These are the prayers the first Christians joined in.

This is what it means to pray without ceasing. We are told to keep eating our vegetables, This doesn't mean we walk around all day eating from a big bowl full of vegetables. That would be silly. What it does mean is to include them in your meals: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In the same way, pray without ceasing means don't cease from your morning and evening prayers. We add prayers at other times for sure. Meals are a good time to pray. As are other times as well.

So what do you need from the Lord? The Lords Prayer gives us a complete basic list. But we want to make our prayers our own. We all need help with our life of faith. We need help with our personal struggles, our fears, our frustrations, troubles that are upsetting us and disturbing us. We need help for our physical bodies and material lives. God hears us. In love he answers us. Blessed are our hearts as they rest in the strength of our God.

If God helps us, he can also help others. That puts us in an opportune spot for praying for others. There's our family, our friends, the church. There's the people that come into our lives along the way. And there is the world. Those are all important subjects for prayer. Those areas form the outline used in our prayer of the church we use here each week. It's a good outline for our personal prayer as well and I commend it to you.

God bless you with his Holy Spirit that also intercedes for you, that you are empowered to approach the throne of your heaven Father with confidence through Christ Jesus and then ask, seek, and knock for everything needed by you and your neighbor.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

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