

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Friend at Midnight

Part 11 - August 12, 2007

[VIDEO: A FRONT PORCH]

[*Pounding on the door, unannounced*] Has someone ever woken you up in the middle of the night? It's kind of scary, if you don't know who it is. Do you grab a shotgun? I guess we'll find out! Who would be knocking this late?!

Let's read from Luke eleven, verses five through ten.

Then [Jesus] said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. - *Luke 11:5-10 NIV*

The section for this parable begins with a disciple's request:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray ..." - *Luke 11:1 NIV*



They *could've* said, "Teach us to turn water into wine!", or "... heal the sick!" or, "... raise the dead!" or, "... walk on water!" But, they wanted Jesus to sharpen and hone the way they prayed. It isn't that they *didn't* know how to pray. But, they recognized that they didn't know how to pray the way that *Jesus* prayed. They prayed religiously; Jesus prayed relationally.

He answers the request in three ways: first, He teaches them the "dialogue" of prayer:

When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into [away from] temptation." - *Luke 11:2-4 NIV*

The Lord's Prayer is a model; it's *not* a word-for-word liturgy to be recited by religious rote. It's a blueprint for a profoundly relational conversation with a Heavenly *Father*.

This is what the disciples wanted to learn how to do! Then, Jesus follows this with the parable of “The Friend at Midnight” to highlight the “attitude” of prayer. We must be careful not to come to a “Father” with the notion that He is reluctant to consider a request or respond to a need.

And finally, He explains the parable’s simple but insightful point:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. – *Luke 11:9 NIV*

- A. To “ask” means: To make a request.
- B. To “seek” means: To undertake a search.
- C. To “knock” means: To watch for an opportunity.

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s back up and look at the culture that surrounds this particular story.

Houses were usually one room, with families sleeping together on floor mats (even small livestock was brought inside for safety). So, friends at midnight caused *lots* of commotion.

Folks often traveled at night to avoid the intense heat, and there were no phones, so it was not uncommon to have family or friends show up *unannounced* in the middle of the night. I imagine Jesus, as a young boy, had several experiences of waking up late at night as Joseph gave bread to a neighbor.

In Palestinian villages there were no bakeries. Each day before sunrise the wives would bake enough bread for that day. So, when it was gone it was gone until the next day. And, three small loaves was the standard portion for one person.

Now, we’ve talked about how a parable is usually a kind of a mix between a riddle and a joke. They’re meant to make us think; and they usually contain an element of surprise.

Q: So, do you have any idea what the *unexpected aspect* of this parable is?

A: That this sleeping neighbor would be reluctant to help out!

This was unthinkable! People were incredibly dependent upon one another in Jesus’ day; so hospitality was held in extremely high regard. To have no food to offer a guest was considered a shameful disgrace; not just for the family, but the entire *village*.

Culturally, it would be similar to one of us waking a neighbor at midnight to call 911, because there’d been an accident. If they refused to make the call because it was inconvenient, they would certainly earn the scorn of the neighborhood.

Part of this parable's "riddle" is realizing that it's wrong to think of God as indisposed or "put out". He's a *devoted* Father, eager to respond when His children are at His door. This sense of security is *crucial* when it comes to prayer. We go to God not as His neighbor or even His friend, but as His *child*.

... because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. - *Luke 11:8b NIV*

In Jesus' culture, sincerity was emphasized by boldness. The friend at the door at midnight wouldn't say, "I'm so sorry to bother you." That's *our* culture. That's how *we* emphasize sincerity. He would've said, "I *must* have you do this!" Again, it's very similar to us asking a neighbor to call 911; we wouldn't ask *apologetically*, we'd knock *loudly* and ask *boldly*! And if they refused, we'd *run* to the next house and knock on *that* door! We'd ask, we'd seek, and we'd knock till we got results!

So, Jesus is making two points with this parable:

1. God is *not* like the unwilling, reluctant neighbor.
2. We *are* to be like the man who made a bold request.



God wants you to be a little pushy: Pray Until Something Happens

Ask Him as you would confidently ask a loving father; and then seek His will when you don't understand the answer; and knock until a door of opportunity opens. If we want an answer, or a solution to a problem, God expects us to expend some effort in the process of finding it.



Jesus said to pray: "Give us each day our daily bread"

But, He sure didn't mean to stop getting up before sunrise to bake what the family needs for the day!

- We pray for knowledge of God's will and God's Word, but we sure better be diligently searching the Scriptures!
- We pray for physical healing, but we sure better be making healthy choices, and seeking sound treatment!

It reminds of that old joke about the guy caught in a flood who refuses his rescuers' attempts because he's so sure that God is going to save him. And he dies, and goes to Heaven, and asks God why He failed him. God says, "I sent a truck, a boat, and a helicopter; what more did you want?!"

When you know the destination, but you don't know how to get to it, what do you do?

Well, first you ask for directions. Unless you're a man! Asking requires a good deal of humility. It means admitting our helplessness (breadlessness).

And the promise is: "Everyone who asks receives"

If you humbly call upon God as Father, you won't be ignored.



Have you ever been given directions that weren't that clear, and they didn't really make a lot of sense to you? What do you do in that situation? You seek. This is **asking** plus **acting**. You go down different roads and you keep an eye out for signs.

And the promise is: "Seek and you will find"

But we must seek with sincerity; which means looking for *His* will, not *my* will, to be done. If we always got what we prayed for, the results would be disastrous!

And finally, when you think you're where you're supposed to be, but all the doors are closed and *locked*, what do you do? You knock. This is **asking** plus **acting** plus **persistence**. Jesus isn't talking about begging, nagging, or bargaining. It's about "knocking" ... not trying to beat down God's door!

Timing can be off; desires can be short-sighted; and frankly, we can have ongoing patterns of sin that need to be addressed.

The promise is: "Knock and the door will be opened to you"

God doesn't become more *willing*; but quite often I become more capable of receiving what he desired for me all along.



There's a great story about a young lumberjack who got a job because he fell more trees than the seasoned pros. As the weeks went on, he worked faster, harder, and longer, but his numbers kept dropping till he was the *least* productive on the crew. The foreman asked if he'd been sharpening his axe. He said, "Been working too hard to take the time!"

Have you been too busy lately to sharpen your edge? Are you trying harder, going faster, but getting duller? It might be time for you to say: "Lord, teach *me* to pray."

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. Everyone who asks receives.
2. He who seeks finds.
3. To him who knocks, the door will be opened.
4. God knows what I want, but I know what I need.