

# Red Chairables

## *The Friend at Midnight*

Part 9 – July 17, 2011

Has someone ever woken you up, pounding on your front door, in the middle of the night? It's scary if you don't know who it is. Do you grab a shotgun?

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*

This parable tends to be avoided; because, it compares God to an indisposed friend who must be badgered into offering assistance.



Ruins of houses in ancient Capernaum

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. - *Luke 11:7b NIV*

Houses, in Jesus' day, were usually small, one room structures built close together like apartments. And everyone slept on floor mats. Even small animals were brought in, for safekeeping and heat.

A small goat is good for 150 BTUs an hour! So, imagine what it must have been like trying to get everyone settled down! You finally get the *kids* tucked in and off to sleep (*and the children*), and then: knock-knock, "Psst. Can I get some bread?" I get the reaction; but, why is Jesus comparing it to God? He isn't. The insight here is found in the *contrast*.

This is known as a *how-much-more-so* parable. If an unwilling, inconvenienced, irritated *neighbor* will supply your needs, *how much more so* a *loving Father* who never sleeps or locks a door? The point is: "Don't think of God like *this*." But, who do you suppose was *thinking of God* like this? This parable is the center of a three-part response to a disciple.

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 11:1a NIV*

It's not that they didn't *know* how to pray; they were religious, Jewish men, steeped in their culture. They knew how to pray!



Jewish boys at the Wailing Wall

There are traditional prayers upon waking, washing, eating, and finishing. There's a morning blessing, an evening blessing, and a bedtime blessing. There are weekend prayers, holiday prayers, and special prayers for things like seeing a rainbow, receiving bad news, smelling spices, and eating fruit. I'm just scratching the surface. There are prayers and blessings for every *detail* of the daily experience.

But the central, most solemn prayer, recited three times a day, in a soft, low voice (while standing), is the Amidah [ah-MEE-dah].



Jewish men praying at the Wailing Wall

It's an invocation made up of three prayers of praise, 13 petitions, and three prayers of thanks. If you missed saying one, you prayed it twice at the next session. Scholars estimate that Jewish men of Jesus' time prayed 3-4 hours a day! So, it isn't that they didn't know how to pray; but they didn't know how to pray *the way Jesus prayed!* There was *passion* in his prayers; and he was *refreshed* and *restored* when He prayed.



His prayers were relational, not religious.

And they saw this, and they wanted to know, "How do you *pray* like that?!" And this is when he offers a model that begins: "Our Father ..."

And He begins to show them that: God is a Father not a force.

The model in Luke (11:2-4) is shorter than the version recorded by Matthew (6:9-13), demonstrating that it was a pattern for *personal* prayer, *not* a strict formula. *That*, they had in the Amidah! The Amidah is beautiful and Biblical; but three times a day, year after year, takes its toll. Some would use the Amidah to showcase their piety and showoff their singing skills. So, before Jesus offers his model prayer in Matthew, he warns them:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. - *Matthew 6:5 NIV*

As you can imagine, many would just rattle through the Amidah as quickly as possible, thinking it's the words, the act, and not the attitude that matters to God. So, Jesus also says:

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. - *Matthew 6:7 NIV*

Now, this is where it really gets fun! Jesus not only challenges their formal, ceremonial perception of God by telling them to address Him as Dad, he brilliantly summarizes the Amidah. I'll speed read the opening three praises of the Amidah (I'm omitting the 13 petitions and three thanksgivings).

O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth will declare your praise. Blessed are you, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the great, mighty and revered God, the Most High God who bestows loving-kindnesses, the Creator of all, who recalls the good deeds of the fathers and who brings a Redeemer to their children's children for his name's sake, in love. O king, helper, savior and shield. Blessed are You, O Lord, the shield of Abraham. You, O Lord, are mighty forever, You are the Reviver of the dead, You are greatly able to save. You sustain the living in loving-kindness, You revive the dead with great compassion, You support the falling, heal the sick, set free the bound and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like You, O Master of mighty deeds? Who compares to You, a king who puts to death and restores to life, and brings forth salvation? And You are faithful to revive the dead. Blessed are You, O Lord, who revives the dead. You are holy and your Name is holy, and your holy ones praise You every day. Blessed are You, Adonai, the God Who is holy.

And Jesus revises and replaces this opening in his example.

When you pray, say: "Father, **hallowed be your name** ..." - Luke 11:2b NIV

This is why he was so astonishing and wonderful *and* scandalous! His stunned disciples would've been like, "We can *do* that?!" Your Dad is dying to hear four, *heartfelt* words of affection. He's not a distant, detached, impersonal power. He desires closeness and intimacy with His children. And then he sums up the 13 petitions:

"... 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 temptation." - Luke 11:2-4 NIV



Temple Mount in Jerusalem

He's demonstrating the overlooked wisdom of Solomon:

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. - Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 NIV



Pompeii at night

Then he teaches (and teases) them: Is *this* how *you* think it is?

Then he 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.'" - Luke 11:5-7a NIV

People traveled at night to avoid the extreme heat. And without phones and mail, it was common and reasonable to have family and friends show up unannounced in the middle of the night. And because *everyone* was so incredibly dependent on hospitality, it was unthinkable that a neighbor, let alone a *friend*, would refuse to help with food. It would've been just the opposite! "Forget the bread, let's roast a goat!"

The closest we come to sharing this cultural mindset is when we have an emergency. This is how Jesus' listeners heard the story: "Suppose one of you has a neighbor, and you yell to him at midnight saying, "Call 911! My Friend is having a heart attack in the driveway." Then the neighbor answers, "Not now. I've watching Hoarders! Wait until commercial." I tell you, though he'll not get up and call because he is a good neighbor, yet because of *your* repeated pleas, he'll finally make the call."

Then Jesus reassures them that God isn't like that.

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 11:9-10 NIV*

Approach God as you would a loving Father, and "ask" for *whatever* you need. But, keep "Your kingdom come" in mind. He's *not* going to turn over the workings of the universe just because I prayed! And when you don't like his answer, "seek" his heart and mind and wisdom and will. Don't assume he's a bad friend; assume he has given you your *eternal* best for this *temporal* moment.

In a letter to the exiled Jews in Babylon, Jeremiah wrote:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. - *Jeremiah 29:11-13 NIV*

If all I'm trying to figure out is a how to pray in a way that'll get me what I want, the way I want it, I've missed the point. We must not seek the gift more than the Giver. Don't try to beat the door down with begging, badgering, or bargaining; just "knock". Take what action you can and wait. He wants it to be a partnership.

When Jesus said to pray "Give us each day our daily bread", he certainly didn't mean to stop baking! Likewise, the definition of trusting God has little to do with sitting on our buns! And in that waiting-gap between what-I-can-do and what-needs-to-be-done, I must choose whether I will worry, sin, or trust.

And after the parable, Jesus offers this rationale:



Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? - *Luke 11:11-12 NIV*

What if the kid asks for a snake? Or ... what if he asks for a snake, but *thinks* it's a *fish*?! What I think is a fish might be a snake. Even if I truly believe with all my heart that it's a fish! So, don't assume he's a bad friend; assume you've asked for a snake.

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" - *Luke 11:13 NIV*

And he did, at Pentecost. And even as Jesus promised this, he knew he would have to lay down his life to make it happen. Our Father isn't uncaring, unwilling, or unable. He hasn't bolted the door and gone to sleep. On the contrary, he has proven that he'll willingly sacrifice whatever it takes, to answer your prayers as Father knows best.