

## This is Why Prayer is Possible!

Luke 11:5-13

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Stephen Davey

After teaching His disciples how to pray, Jesus demonstrates the effectiveness of prayer with two parables designed to help us learn more about the heart and desires of God. We not only need to learn what to say when we pray, and what attitude to pray with, but also when and why to pray. These two stories illustrate the readiness of God to hear our prayers, and the reliance we can have on His goodness.

I have read that online search engines have ways of tracking whatever you find interesting online. Which explains why, after I purchased a necktie online some time ago, I started getting one advertisement after another for neckties. I finally asked our IT Director what to do and he taught me how to erase the cookies. I had always thought cookies were little round things that went with milk, but not anymore!

By the way, for weeks now my email account and my cell phone number have been hacked, and people on my staff and even in the church have been getting emails from me that I'm going to need to meet with them about some critical issue. One person told me they got an email from me where I was asking them for gift certificates. Obviously, that wasn't me; I would be asking for chocolate.

I have also read that search engines like Amazon can tell whenever an e-book reader highlights a sentence in a book. At the end of the year, it can create a list of the most popular passages in books, highlighted by the most people as they read their e-books.

One author wrote that Amazon, sometime ago, released the most highlighted passage in online Bibles. You might expect it to be John 3:16 or Psalm 23; but the most highlighted verse was from Philippians 4: "in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Adapted from Robert J. Morgan, [Worry Less, Live More](#) (Thomas Nelson, 2017), p. xiii

In other words, the most highlighted verse had to do with how to pray and what to expect from prayer.

That is evidently a pressing issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian, but let me tell you, it was the pressing issue of 1<sup>st</sup> century disciples and, in fact, every century in between.

We're working our way through Luke's Gospel at chapter 11, and the Lord has just finished teaching His disciples how to pray.

And although we took nine sermons to unpack the meaning of each word in this prayer, Jesus has taught them a model prayer that takes no more than two minutes to pray.

And now that He's just finished, **here in verse 4**, I imagine the disciples just sort of sitting there and thinking, "That's it? That's all we've have to say? We will really get the attention of our Heavenly Father with a two-minute prayer?"

And Jesus is reading their minds, He's aware of their questions and their doubts. And He's also aware that they don't know much about God the Father—that's the deeper issue—and what's about to happen is a revelation of the nature of God the Father.

I am convinced in my own life and probably in yours as well, the challenging issue is not so much that we don't know how to pray; it's that we don't know God the Father to whom we pray.

So, Jesus comes to the end of teaching His disciples this model prayer, and without pausing to catch His breath, He launches into two parables about prayer; but get this ahead of time: these parables

are designed to teach us more about our Heavenly Father.

***The first parable begins in Luke 11, here at verse 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, for a friend of mine  
has arrived on a journey,  
and I have nothing to set  
before him'; 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'?"*

*Luke 11:5-7*

Before we go any further, the expression Jesus uses to open this parable: "**Which of you has a friend**" is a rhetorical question that expects a negative response.

In other words, Jesus is asking, "Can any of you imagine a friend like this turning away his friend?" and He's expecting us to say, "Of course not; friends don't act that way."

David E. Garland, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 465

But then again, it's possible! Even a close friend might be rather reluctant at this kind of inconvenience.

The homes of ordinary people in the first century were built with two levels; one

level raised somewhat above the other. Often, as is still the case in certain parts of the Middle east, the domestic animals—chickens and goats—were brought into the house and kept on the lower level at night to prevent them from being stolen. All the family slept on mats in the upper level.

Adapted from Ivor Powell, Luke's Thrilling Gospel (Kregel Publications, 1965), p. 267

The door was locked most often by a wooden bar passed through rings on the doors and door frame.

Adapted from Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 419

Now during these days, people often traveled at night to avoid the heat of the day; they would show up at the homes of family members or friends, and it could be unannounced, because they weren't able to call ahead.

Adapted from Ben Brown, "41 Day Prayer Adventure" (printed transcript, 2022)

So, here's the setting, the door has been shut, the animals are sleeping—that would include the children, thank the Lord they are finally asleep—everybody is down for the night when this traveler just so happens to show up. Jesus specifically mentions this event taking place at midnight.

In this culture, hospitality was a matter of personal honor. It was a duty. It was shameful to refuse it.

In fact, to offer someone a loaf of bread already eaten from—leftover from lunch—would have been considered disgraceful in this culture.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 419

And that's true today, you're not going to offer your friend half of your tuna sandwich for dinner that you didn't finish at lunch.

Now here's the dilemma: this man doesn't have any fresh bread to offer. There's nowhere to turn. He can't run down to Food Lion. So, he runs next door and knocks on his friend's door for help.

This is a real crisis here; he needs his friend to help him out of this dilemma.

Jesus says, "Can you imagine a friend saying, 'My kids are down for the night; don't bother me with your problem.'"

To put it in today's culture, this would be like a friend calling you in the middle of the night to say that his wife has just gone into labor, and he needs to get her to the hospital.

Garland, p. 466

But he didn't fill up his car with gas ahead of time and he doesn't have enough to make it to the hospital so could he borrow your car?

The obvious answer is yes! What kind of friend would say, "Look, the kids are finally asleep. It's midnight for goodness' sake. Besides, I've turned the alarm on and if I turn it off and then back on again it's going to wake up the kids and the dog and the cat. I don't want to disturb the kids and the dog." The cat is already disturbed!

Here in the parable, this guy just won't go away. He keeps on knocking. **And Jesus says here in verse 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."*

Luke 11:8

"Okay; okay; hold it down; I'm coming."

Now the average Christian reads this and says, "I get the point, I need to keep pounding on the door because eventually God will give in, and I'll get whatever I want."

And that is exactly the opposite point of what the Lord is teaching.

Jesus is not giving us a comparison; He's giving us a contrast. Your friend might let you down, but God won't. Your friend might be reluctant, but God isn't like your friend.

He's not some sleepy man who doesn't want to be disturbed. That's how people are; even good friends can fail to help you out of a dilemma because it's just too much trouble.

But God the Father will never think you're a nuisance. *"Don't bother Me with that little problem you've got on your hands; besides, it's midnight!"*

No, what Jesus is teaching here is just the opposite! And He reinforces it here in **verse 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. 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

There's nothing wrong with being persistent in praying; persistence can reflect your passion.

But persistence isn't intended to wear God down to finally give in; maybe if I pound on the door until my knuckles are bloody, I'll get God's attention.

No that's how people are. Even good friends.

But as Phillips Brooks wrote 100 years ago:

*"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of His willingness. Persistence is not an attempt to change God's mind but to get ourselves to the place where we accept His answer."*

Phillips Brooks – 1893

And when you think about it, every prayer is answered in one way or another. One author writes, “It might not be the answer we wanted; but even a refusal is the answer of love from the Father who sees all the way through eternity.

William Barclay, [The Gospel of Luke](#) (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 146

So don’t misunderstand, this verse isn’t a blank check to get the answer we want to everything we ask for.

The Lord has already taught us in this prayer to pray for His Kingdom agenda; to pray for His rule and reign in our lives; to pray for His will to be done on earth in and through us, as it is done in heaven.

Prayer is aligning our will to His. It keeps us in the proper place where we accept His answer.

The point Jesus is making here is that you can always knock; you can always seek; you can always ask because God the Father is always available.

Which is why throughout the testimony of the apostle Paul you have this invitation to pray as a daily conversation:

- Without ceasing I mention you in my prayers (Romans 1:9).
- I give thanks to my God always for you (1 Corinthians 1:4).
- I do not cease to give thanks for you (Colossians 1:9).
- Continue steadfastly in prayer (Colossians 4:2).

- Praying at all times in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18).
- Constantly mentioning you in our prayers (1 Thessalonians 1:2).
- I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day (2 Timothy 1:3).
- Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

List adapted from Paul E. Miller, [A Praying Life](#) (NavPress, 2017), p. 55

Why, to wear God down? No, to revel in the fact that:

- You cannot come to Him too often.
- You cannot come to Him at the wrong time.
- You cannot come to Him with something too small.
- You will never come to Him and find Him uninterested.

He will always answer.

His answer might be “Yes” to what you asked for.

His answer might be “No, not now.”

George Muller who directed orphanages in England—and a man who saw many prayers answered—also experienced delays as well. He used to paraphrase Psalm 37:23 to say, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and the stops are ordered by the Lord as well.”

Your steps and your stops are part of God's plan.

So, the answer might be "Yes"; It might be "No, not now"; it might be "No, not ever"; or the answer might be "No, there's something better."

Something you never thought about.  
Something deeper.

Paul prayed three times for his illness to be cured and the Lord said, "No, I've got something better: grace to endure your weakness."

Yes.

No, not now.

No, not ever.

No, there's something better.

But whatever the answer might be, the critical principle of prayer to remember—which is really a description of the nature of God the Father—is: **God the Father is always reachable.**

Not just available, but reachable.

The disciples were probably thinking, this prayer is less than 35 words, we're used to the long prayers of the rabbis; that's how you reach heaven, right?

There's nothing wrong with long prayers, but God your Father is reached by you whether your prayers are long or short.

The reason prayer is possible is because your Father is entirely, willingly reachable.

**The second reason prayer is possible is because**, not only is God the Father reachable, He is honorable.

And that's the point of **the second parable**, which begins here at **verse 11**:

*"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?"*

*Luke 11:11-12*

Again, this question is expecting a negative response. Just as the Lord effectively started out in **verse 5** by saying, "Can you imagine someone who has a friend responding like this?", now here in **verse 11**, "Can you imagine a father doing this to his son?"

His son wants a fish for lunch, but his father slips him a snake. More than likely, this snake was the typical tiny water snake often used in these early centuries as bait.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 293

His son wants an egg to eat and his father hands him a dead scorpion, which, when dead rolls up about the size of an egg.

What kind of father would pull those kinds of tricks on his son? A disgraceful, dishonorable father. And Jesus says, "None of us can imagine that kind of cruel father." But it is possible.

J. Paul Getty Jr. had a father who was one of the richest men in the world. Paul Jr. rarely saw his father as he was raised in California by his mother. When Paul was in high school, he wrote a very special letter to his father. He had wanted to say some things to his dad that were important to him. He wrote the letter and sent it off. And a few weeks later he received back from his father that same letter. No response from his father, just this letter where his father had marked all the grammatical errors with a red pencil. Paul Jr. said on one occasion, "I have never gotten over that letter."

That's the kind of human father Jesus is describing here and it's so startling that we can't imagine a father being that dishonorable. Only the worst of the worst would do something like that.

But again, Jesus is delivering a parable that is not a comparison, but a contrast. God isn't like that friend, and He isn't like this father.

You might find a father on earth that disgraceful and that deceitful and that dishonorable, but God the Father isn't like any father on earth. He doesn't deceive His children or try to trick them. He doesn't look for ways to harm them.

You see, Jesus is answering the questions about prayer that disciples will be asking for centuries.

- Does my Heavenly Father really care about me?
- Is He really listening to me or is He tired of me?

- Is He willing to help me, or am I on my own?
- Does He really care about what I really need?

And the answer is yes because your heavenly Father is the perfect Father.

And that's the point of the parable, **here in verse 13:**

*"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

*Luke 11:13*

The gift of the Holy Spirit includes everything that comes along with Him:

- the gift of discernment by the Spirit.
- the gift of wisdom by the Spirit.
- the gift of assurance by the Spirit.
- the gifts of love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness by means of our relationship with the Spirit.

Those are the gifts available to those who will just come to their heavenly Father and ask.

You can't come to Him too often and you can't come to Him at the wrong time.

Prayer is possible because Your Father is always reachable, and He is always honorable

So, make it a habit throughout the day to come to Him in prayer.

I have read that in 1982, the Today show in New York City scheduled an interview with Billy Graham. When he arrived at the studio, one of the producers informed Billy Graham's assistant that a private room had been set aside for the reverend for prayer before the broadcast. That was a nice gesture, but this assistant told the producer that Mr. Graham would not need that room. The producer was a bit shocked that this world-renowned evangelist would not want to pray before being interviewed on live national television. Graham's assistant simply and wisely responded, "Mr. Graham started praying when he got up this morning, he prayed while eating his breakfast, he prayed on the way over here in the car, and he'll probably be praying all the way through the interview."

Citation: [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com) Harold Myra, The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham (Zondervan, 2005)

That incident is not just a revelation of Billy Graham's conversational prayer life; it's a revelation of nature and person of God the Father.

And so, you can come to Him with the simplest and most sincere prayer; it can be as long or short as you need.

It can follow this pattern here that exalts the Father and then surrenders to His way and His will.

Prayer is possible because your heavenly Father is always reachable, and He is always honorable.

Why don't you stand and say it with me as we close today:

*Our Father, who is in  
Heaven*

*Hallowed be Your name.*

*Your kingdom come,*

*Your will be done,*

*On earth as it is in Heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily  
bread,*

*And forgive us our sins,*

*As we forgive those who've  
sinned against us.*

*And lead us not into  
temptation,*

*But deliver us from evil.*

*For Yours is the kingdom,*

*And the power,*

*And the glory forever.*

*Amen.*

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