

## A study of Jesus' Parables

### PERSEVERANCE

Imagine you lived in the time of Jesus. You aren't an apostle. You believe Jesus is who he claims to be and your counted among his disciples. The Apostle Peter comes and knocks on your door one day. He says, "If you want, Jesus wants to spend time with you. He wants to have a personal conversation for as long as you want to meet." Knowing how busy Jesus is, you can't believe the offer—he wants to talk to *you*.

Jesus' ministry lasted three years. During that time, he stayed busy. Such an offer to any one person, especially outside of his apostles or some VIP, seems unthinkable. Yet, after he rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, he wants nothing more than to have this kind of personal time with all his disciples. Even with such an offer, many of us struggle to find time to pray. We don't understand it and, if honest, we sometimes doubt if it works.

Today's passage teaches us a key ingredient in effective prayer—persistence. The famed preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "By perseverance the snail reached the ark." Persevering and persisting in prayer can move the hand of a mighty God. This is the God we know and trust, the Father who does good for his children.

### LUKE 11:5–13

<sup>5</sup> Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, <sup>6</sup> because a friend of mine has stopped here while on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.' <sup>7</sup> Then he will reply from inside, 'Do not bother me. The door is already shut, and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup> I tell you, even though the man inside will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of the first man's sheer persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

<sup>9</sup> "So I tell you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup> What father among you, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, although you 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!"

### SCOUTING REPORT

**SETTING** Training his disciples in prayer motivated by God's goodness

**NEED** Explain God's heart

**STORY** A needy man bothers his neighbor.

**TRUTH** God honors himself by answering prayer

### DISCUSSION

Name one or two crazy things you've ever prayed for?  
How did God answer?

1. What reason does Jesus give for the neighbor getting up and providing bread? (8)

2. What 3 actions does Jesus encourage regarding prayer? What results should we expect? (9)

3. What 2 analogies did Jesus use to illustrate a father's goodness? (11b-12)

4. Why should the fact that God is a good Father motivate prayer?

5. How should God's goodness encourage a person when God answers "No?"

6. What stood out to you from our discussion of prayer? What steps do you need to take to persist in prayer?

Nothing is as encouraging as when God answers prayer. Conversely, nothing is as discouraging as when you feel like God doesn't or can't answer. If you've struggled with this, talk to your coach today.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

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### STUDY NOTES

#### GET ON UP

During Jesus' ministry, he modeled for his disciples (and us) what it means to live fully dependent on God. If anyone had an excuse to skip out on practices such as prayer, it was Jesus. Yet his example was exactly the opposite. Prayer was a priority for Jesus. If *he* needed prayer, so does everyone else.

Jesus' disciples understood Jesus' priority on prayer. Our passage today began with a disciple asking Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus then set up a hypothetical situation, ***"Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine has stopped here while on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.'"*** We might have some questions about this situation. It wasn't as odd as you might think in Jesus' culture. Because this situation was common enough, regardless of the time of day, and because of the cultural expectation, Jesus' audience understood that the man's excuses were lame. Despite his excuses, Jesus said that ***"because of the first man's sheer persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs."***

#### A GRACIOUS NEIGHBOR ILLUSTRATES GOD'S GOODNESS

In the context of prayer, Jesus' parable teaches a simple lesson—be persistent. We must persevere in prayer. Jesus explains, ***"I tell you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."***

Hopefully through our study you've come to see God's character in a new way. We spent two Weeks on Luke 15 so that you may understand God's heart. This is the basis that Jesus taught his disciples, and us, why we should persist and persevere in prayer, ***"If you then, although you 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!"***

God hears and answers prayer because he is good. Here is a simple, but ultimate truth, what you believe about God determines your prayer life. If we believe he is good, he cares, he has the power to bring about our best, how could we not pray? However, if I can't trust in who God is, if I don't believe he is a good and compassionate Father who runs to the lost and broken, then I will not pray.

### GOD'S GOODNESS MOTIVATES OUR PRAYER

Despite all the Bible's teaching on prayer—and there is quite a bit—it remains one of the most confusing and underutilized spiritual disciplines. If you haven't been taught to pray, you can start with the A.C.T.S. model. It stands for Adoration—prayers of praise, calling on his character and promises. Confession—confessing sins, agreeing that my sin is wrong, and asking him to change me. Thanksgiving—prayers of gratitude for the blessings we have all received. Finally, Supplication—this is just a fancy word meaning praying for yourself and others. Start with those closest and pray out from there. For example: pray for yourself and your relationship with God, pray for family, friends, teachers, coaches, all the way out to world-leaders if you want.

God is good and always answers our prayers. That's not to say he always answers, "Yes." God is a good Father and his answers are "Yes," "No," or "Later." For example, my fourth-grade crush is not my wife because God said, "No." To my prayers for a wife, God answered, "Later." Then, when I was asking God while pursuing my (now) wife towards marriage, he answered, "Yes."

The point is that God's not always going to say "Yes" when we pray. As we grow in our relationship with him, learning to trust him, we become increasingly OK with "No." I have two friends, both lost their respective mothers after prolonged illnesses. Both friends prayed for healing, yet both mothers passed away. One friend came through that terrible circumstance with a deep abiding relationship with the Lord. The other walked away from her faith completely. What's the difference?

In another episode of Jesus teaching on prayer, he taught his followers to say, ***"Your will be done"*** (Matthew 6:11). My one friend trusted the Lord. When she prayed for healing, she prayed fervently, but she also prayed that the Lord's will be done. My other friend just prayed for healing. It wasn't the Lord's will she sought; it was her own. She never trusted the Lord.

There are many reasons God doesn't answer prayer. For example, he doesn't listen to sinners (John 9:31), when we ask with wrong/selfish motives (James 4:3), or even when a husband dishonors his wife (1 Peter 3:7). But sometimes the answer is just "No."

Psalm 37:4 says ***"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."*** God is not a magical genie. When we delight in him, he conforms our hearts to his own. He shapes our desires such that when we pray, we pray his heart back to him—and when a child shares the heart of their father, they usually get what they ask for.