

Luke 11:5-13
The Generosity of God

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”
A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

What comes to mind when you think of God? This is a question which asks not how much do you know *about* God, but rather *how well* do you know Him? John defined spiritual maturity as knowing God when he wrote, “¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:13-14). Paul echoed this sentiment. “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). So again, what do you think of when you think of God?

Do you think of God as omniscient, omnipotent, and sovereign? Job did. He said, “I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). The psalmist agreed,
“The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
The plans of His heart from generation to generation” (Psalm 33:11).

God made this unmistakably clear to Isaiah when He said,
“⁹For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is no one like Me,
¹⁰Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things which have not been done,
Saying, ‘My purpose will be established,
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9-10).

But if God is omniscient, omnipotent, and sovereign, then what is the purpose of prayer? Certainly if God knows all things, there is nothing we can tell Him. If God has already determined what He will do, then what is the point of asking Him to do something? Do believers prayers change anything? Does it really matter if we pray?

We might begin by remembering that Jesus prayed. And Jesus prayed often.

Luke 10:21-22, “²¹At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, “I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. ²²All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

John 11:41-42, “⁴¹So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ⁴²I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.”

Matthew 26:39-44, “³⁹And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.’ ⁴⁰And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘so, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? ⁴¹Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ ⁴²He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.’ ⁴³Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.”

Moreover, Jesus commanded His disciples to pray Luke 18:1. “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.” And we know that Jesus taught His disciples how to pray Luke 11:1-4.

We must remember that while God is sovereign and ordains what will come to pass, He also ordains the means to those ends. The prophet Micah predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem,

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago,
From the days of eternity.”(Micah 5:2).

Yet God used a census from a Roman emperor to bring that about. “¹Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. ²This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. ⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David” (Luke 2:1-4).

Also, while it was God’s sovereign plan that Jesus be crucified for the sins of those whom He had called, Peter acknowledged that it was the hostility of the Jews and Roman authorities that served as the means by which this was brought about. “²²Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know - ²³this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:22-23).

The Story

Having responded to the disciple who asked for an example of prayer, Jesus continued His teaching on prayer with a short story.

“⁵Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷and from inside he answers and says, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs” (v. 5-8).

The word for friend, *philos*, means someone like a brother. In this case, it was a neighbor with whom the person was on good terms. People in the ancient world were far less independent than we are today. There was not the world of the garage door opener where people sneak into and out of their houses without the need to say hello to anyone. They needed one another. Since there was no elaborate government infrastructure to support society, people supported one another. They looked out for one another, and met one another's needs when required.

In this case, one person had a guest arrive late at night. Traveling at night was not uncommon - it was much cooler - and it was often safer and more convenient to stay with a friend than in a local inn. It seems the visitor had not sent word ahead that he would be arriving, because his host had gone to bed unaware of the impending visit. In the middle of the night his guest arrived and, finding himself unable to supply the needs of his weary and probably hungry friend, the man went to his neighbor.

People were much more regulated by the sun in the ancient world, and they usually went to bed soon after nightfall. Therefore, the neighbor had probably been asleep for a few hours. Naturally, he did not appreciate being awakened. After all, this was no emergency. The man's house was not on fire, nobody's life was threatened, he was not being robbed. This was simply a matter of convenience. So, not wanting to awaken his family, the neighbor told the man to go away. His door was shut tight, and most likely all the family slept on a mat in the same one room so the opening of the door and finding of food would rouse everyone in the family from their rest.

However, the man refused to give up. He persisted in the knocking until the neighbor, realizing that the noise from the knocking would eventually awaken everybody anyway, decided to get up and give the man what he wanted. The word translated persistence, *anaideia*, means audacity or boldness. The man got what he wanted from his neighbor because he did not go away when he was, at first, rebuffed.

The Lesson

Lest His point be missed (after all, the disciples were not always gifted at interpreting what Jesus was saying) Jesus continued, “⁹so I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened” (v. 9-10).

Jesus was emphatic. He spoke in the first person and gave authority to what He said. He used three verbs of increasing intensity to make His point, and each one carried the same promise. If you ask, you will receive, if you seek you will find, if you knock the door will be opened. If we can count on a friend, who may be motivated only by a desire to get back to sleep, how much more so can we depend upon our Heavenly Father Who loves us. We can learn from this how open ended are the promises of God. These promises are broad and unqualified. Such is the generosity of our God.

But this was not a blank check. There are other principles taught in Scripture that must be applied as well. This was never meant as a “name it and claim it” philosophy of prayer. Remember James 4:3, “you ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” Jesus had just finished offering a pattern of prayer that was God-centered. This promise must be

considered in that context. Any prayer offered from selfish motives, not seeking to further God's kingdom or fulfill His sovereign will, is not guaranteed to be granted.

By emphasizing the increasing intensity of the verbs, Jesus employed a common feature of Jewish logic. He reasoned from the lesser to the greater. To begin, asking implies a sense of need. We have no excuses. If we are weak, do we ask for strength. If we are sinful, do we ask for reform. If we remain who we are it is because we have no desire to be changed.

But God-centered asking also implies humility. Luke 18:10-13 gave an illustration of two men each before God. ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' ¹³But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'" The Pharisee was not asking, he was telling God. The tax collector was asking. He was humble; he was broken. That is how we should come before the throne. That is the prerequisite for asking in prayer.

Seeking is asking plus action. It is action, not merely words alone. We must remember that we are often the answer to our own prayers. For example, if we pray for knowledge of God, we must also search the Bible and study it diligently. If we pray to be better husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and we must discipline our lives to partner with God's grace as we grow. When we pray, we must remember that we cannot abdicate all responsibility for the outcome. Sometimes, we are the means by which God answers our own prayers.

Knocking is asking, plus action, plus perseverance. We are to be "devoted to prayer" (Colossians 4:2, Romans 12:12). We are to "always give thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God" (Ephesians 5:20) and "with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). And of course, we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But we cannot just mumble words while we think of other things. Saying prayers is not praying. Many words is not perseverance.

We must learn great perseverance in prayer. It is not natural for us. We all know that it is far easier to begin a thing than to continue in it. Starting is easier than finishing. But yet we are commanded to pray. Even if our prayers are weak, let us continue to pray. The Bible is replete with examples of saints that have persevered in prayer. For how many years did Hannah pray for a son (1 Samuel 1)? For how long had Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed for a child (Luke 1)?

Generosity

Jesus then posed two hypothetical questions. ¹¹Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? ¹²Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?" (v. 11-12). Jesus was making an obvious point. Fathers take care of their children. Even human fathers. Any normal father seeks to meet the needs of his child. If their child

needs shelter, they provide it. If they need food, they feed them. If an earthly father does such things, then how much more so a perfect Heavenly Father? “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (v. 13).

We are evil. The word is not an exaggeration. It states straightforwardly the total depravity of human nature. All of the disciples (not only Judas) were evil. And if we still think this is a matter of semantics, this is the same word used for Satan, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one” (John 17:5).

Notice that in this passage Jesus is not saying that His disciples do evil, but rather that they are evil. Yet even they know how to do good things. If that is so, then how much more can we count on good things from a perfectly holy and righteous God. A God Who not only does good things, but Who is, Himself, good.

Believers get so much more than a fish and an egg. Jesus here promises the gift of the Holy Spirit - the source of all good things.

Comfort, “so the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase” (Acts 9:31).

Conviction, “and He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8).

Power, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8)

Help, “but the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26).

Truth, “but when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

Godly living, “²²but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Take Aways

Let us evaluate our prayer life. With God it is never midnight, He is never asleep, and He is never bothered. Indwelt by and filled with the Holy Spirit, let us pray accordingly.