

Valley Bible Church – Parables of Jesus

What is God like? He desires persevering prayer.

A Story Telling Experience

Since parables are by definition stories, let me tell you two stories and let you listen to a third in a slightly different format.

Story One: *The Friend Who Got Up At Midnight*

(Loosely based on Luke 11:5-8)

It had been a long, rough, treacherous, hot journey and the tired traveler walked in the relative cool of the evenings as much as possible. As darkness fell he turned toward a familiar building where he knew food and shelter would be offered. And so hungry, weary, and footsore he approached his friend's house. It was about midnight.

His good friend was surprised and happy to see the weary traveler and

Immediately ask him in, washing his feet and offering him a cool clean robe as was the custom of their people. Suddenly he realized he had nothing in the house to feed his friend, not even bread. How embarrassing! The market was closed and there was no am/pm or 7-11 convenience stores, so he rushed down the street to the house of a close friend and neighbor to ask for help. He knocked on the door!

Now, in the Middle East the doors were left open all day and people came and went at will with no concern for privacy. But at night, when the door was shut it meant, "DO NOT DISTURB."

The sleepy friend opened the shutters on a small high window and asked, "What do you want?" "I have an unexpected guest and I have no bread to feed him. Loan me a couple loafs until tomorrow." "Are you kidding, go always," replied the friend.

You have to understand. This man lived, as most of the people of that day did, in a one-room house with a hard clay floor. He had undoubtedly brought his animals into the house to protect them from bad weather or thieves during the night. The door was closed and bolted.

Then he had gathered his wife and their children onto a stilted platform in the corner of the house where they all slept together. To get up would wake his wife, the children, not to mention the animals. It would be a fiasco. Who could blame him for saying no.

But the man outside would not take no for an answer. He began to bang on the door and shout, "If you don't get up and loan me some bread I'll wake up your whole household and your whole neighborhood. And so the poor man gave in, got up, opened the door and gave his (former) friend the bread, not because he was his friend, but just to get rid of him.

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Story Two: *The Widow Who Bothered the Judge*

(Loosely based on Luke 18:1-8)

In Israel a widow or an orphan was about as helpless as a person could. Unless her husband's family was willing to take her in or she had brothers or sons to protect and care for her she was "only a woman" and fair game for anyone who chose to cheat or swindle her.

The widow we're considering was being defrauded of some money that was legally owed to her. Perhaps the debt was owed to her husband before he died or part of his will. All we know is that it was a just and legal debt.

She took her complaint to the local judge. He was a Roman magistrate since no Jewish official would hear a case alone without "the council." He turned out to be one of the many unjust judges that were prevalent in that day. In regards to God, he blasphemed Him and as far as men were concerned, he didn't care what they thought. She tried and tried to make an appointment to see him but he refused to have anything to do with this "mere widow woman."

Every morning the judge's receptionist would enter the judge's chambers and tell him, "She's out here again." After days and days of this he finally saw her once, but he laughed her out of his office. Why should he, an important and powerful judge listen to this poor and helpless woman. What could she offer him? She had no money to bribe him and no political clout that offered any advantage to him.

But it wasn't that easy. He slipped out of the side door to go to lunch, and there she was to follow him down the street asking for his mercy. In his court she waved at him from the gallery. As he ate his dinner she could be seen waiting outside his courtyard. As he walked to work or strolled to the market, she pulled at his sleeve and begged him to hear her case.

Finally when it became apparent that she would not give up and leave him alone, he heard her case. Not because of his desire for justice or mercy but simply to get her off his back.

Story Three: *The Pharisee and the Publican*

(A song loosely based on Luke 18:9-14)

Play the Song "Mr. Simon," by Ken Medema

These three stories teach us three things about God and His desires for our prayer life:

- 1. Pray consistently even for our simplest needs**
- 2. Pray persistently even if the answer is withheld**
- 3. Pray humbly recognizing who we are and who God is**

Now let's begin our study of these three parables on prayer.

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The Friend Who Got up at Midnight (Read Luke 11:5-8)

A. Background (Luke 11:1-4)

1. Jesus was praying and his disciples said, "*Lord teach us to pray*"

His response was to teach them "The Disciples Prayer" which has been the foundation of more teaching on prayer than any other passage. But He didn't stop there . . . Jesus continues his instruction on prayer with a parable. It must be important to be tied to the "pattern prayer" so lets look at it again.

2. Prayer is not just suggested but commanded

Luke 18:1--"*at all times men ought to pray and not to faint.*"

1 Thes. 5:17--"*pray without ceasing*" Both are in an imperative mode Jesus modeled this in His life as recorded by Luke: At His Baptism (3:21); Before He chose the twelve (6:12); Before stating who He was (9:18); In preparation for His crucifixion (22:44); etc.

If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we?

B. Basic Truth

1. Prayer should be direct and definite, specific and precise.

"Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey and I have nothing to set before him."(vv. 5-6)

2. Prayer should be persistent.

"And I say to you, ask (keep on asking), and it shall be given to you; seek (keep on seeking), and you shall find; knock (keep on knocking), and it shall be opened to you." (v. 9)

The Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8)

A. Background (Chapter 17)

1. In chapter 17 Jesus has been teaching his disciples and healing many including the ten lepers with only two that came back to thank Him. In answer to questions from the Pharisees about the kingdom of God, He described how things were going to get worse and worse until the end of the world as we know it.

2. In verse 1 of chapter 18 He tells them a parable to explain what their response to these disastrous events should be. Seeing as these things are coming "*they ought to pray and not lose heart.*"

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B. The Judge

- 1. During the time of Jesus, the judges or Roman court magistrates were notoriously bad. Their official title was Dayyaney Gezeroth that meant judges of punishment or justice. The Jews had a play-on-words to express their opinion of these judges. They called them Dayyaney Gezeloth that meant robber judge.**
- 2. He *"did not fear God or respect man."***

C. The Widow

- 1. *"She kept coming to him"* asking for justice and protection from someone who had swindled her. She came again and again until the judge had to take notice and do something.**
- 2. The judge responds, not *"because he fears God or respects man,"* not to see justice served, but *"because this widow bothers me I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out."***

In literal Greek, Luke's humor comes through in the phrase "wear me out." It can be translated "give me a black eye or beat me black and blue."

D. Basic Truth

- 1. Prayer should be directed to the one who has the power to change things or bring relief.**
- 2. Persistence pays off. Luke 11:9--*"Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking."* James 5:16 *"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."***

Broad Lesson for Both Parables

The stories seem to shout, "Prayer is no good unless it is persistent. God is sales resistant and so we have to plead and shout and bang on heaven's door." But that can't be true. Just look at verses 11-13. (READ LUKE 11:11-13)

If a son asks his father for a fish would a father take a serpent or lizard, tuck in the legs and give it to his son. Or if a son asked his father for an egg would his father hand him a scorpion with its limbs and tail hidden. The questions are rhetorical and the answer to both is of course not.

If you human fathers, being by your nature and inclination evil, would not do these things to your children but rather give them good gifts, how much more would your perfect Father God eager give you what you asks for when you need it.

Obviously then we are not being persistent to coerce God to act. God is not sales resistant needing to be prodded like the friend. What then is the purpose of our persistence. It must be to teach us patience and to remind us of our dependence on God for meeting our needs.

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David Redding said it very well:

"Why? Why the crowded waiting room--the tubs of tears before God hears? Why the delay? Celestial red tape? Is God overworked, understaffed, cruel? Or could the bottleneck be us--Prayer's answers postponed for our sakes. We say it is.

"First to show us who is God. If our answer does not pop out as promptly as our fortune stub when we step on the scales, that proves, not God's indifference; impotence, but His power--He is our Father not our slave to come when our hands are folded as if a finger snapped. The delay is our education in humility. The idea that god knows and we don't sinks in slowly. Quick results fool us into believing we brought them all by ourselves. It takes time to tell it is from God not our manufacture.

"But they that wait upon the Lord . . .' become a little less sure of themselves, a little less smug. They are blessed with the meek.

"And secondly, God's deliberateness prevents the wrong prayer from getting anywhere. Looking back we are grateful He didn't always give us what we ask for first. We shall be ashamed of some of today's prayers tomorrow. Some won't bear repeating in the light. Practice makes perfect, polishes of the pagan edges, shifts the weight away from us. The longer we pray for Christ's sake, the less we are likely to pray unworthily. The sham, the dirty, sub-Christian requests, slip away as we say our prayer near the cross. . . .

"God holds back until we pray with passion--until all the yawns are gone and the sleepy, halfhearted hopes and dreams become burning desires. Prayer is only play until it is intense, ruthless. Prayer can't bring peace nor compete with evil until we want peace and the will of God more than anything in the world. The kingdom is no scheme to "get rich quick," and that makes us want it all the more."

Big Point:

God expects us to pray directly, specifically, and persistently for our benefit and the benefit of His kingdom.