

## Bold Prayers

Who would you turn to for help if you were really in a jam? Who would you call if you had a really uncomfortable request? The kind of thing you'd be horrified to ask of 'just anyone'... but you know this person would show up:

One of my most embarrassing moments as a college student happened late on a Friday evening after a really nice date. I had taken my then girlfriend, Stephanie, out to dinner and a show, and we were almost back to campus when I stopped my car for a moment on the side of one of those long rural Indiana roads. See, our school, was a small Christian college where everyone knew everyone. And I wanted to offer a goodnight kiss, or two, or twelve BEFORE we pulled back on to campus. So, after a few sweet nothings, I go to pull back on the road...OH, and I don't think I mentioned...that it was January in north central Indiana... and I'm driving a tiny two-door Nissan Sentra...and you can imagine where this is going ...Yes, Mr. Smooth got his car (and his girlfriend) stuck...20 minutes before curfew, in rural Indiana.

So, as the desperation creeps in...the only person I can think to call is my friend, Jon. Jon's one of my best friends at school...he drives a truck, his family is in the automotive business...man, I sure hope he picks up...And sure enough, He does, and before long at all, Jon shows up in his truck, and has us out on the road in no time. I'll never forget his big grin, when he showed up my uncomfortable moment. A little too big. And folks, I tried to pay Jon for his help. I begged Jon to take my money. But, Jon wasn't going to take my money. He already had a bunch of ideas on how I was gonna pay for that.

In Luke 11, right after Jesus teaches the disciples the "Lord's Prayer," he gives a surprising parable (an uncomfortable dilemma) to help them understand, not just WHAT they're to pray, but HOW they're to pray...how to approach God. And it's not what anyone would have expected. Let's take a look at Luke, chapter 11, beginning in verse 5

READ LUKE 11:5-13 (NASB1995) Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, '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'; and 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*.' I 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.

“So 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. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now 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? Or *if* he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 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?”

*Let's Pray: Lord Jesus, we thank you for your words. Illuminate them again through the power of Your Spirit. Open our hearts and minds to the breadth and length and height and depth of Your love, that we might be filled to all the fullness of God.*

So, if you're new to this story, the context is helpful in making sense of it. A little like my awkward story, Jesus creates a story with an uncomfortable dilemma as a teachable moment.

- (1) First, keep in mind that the ancient near east is an HONOR-based culture that held HOSPITALITY in the highest regard. A visitor was to be welcomed and cared for regardless of when they arrive. So, we can imagine the embarrassment this neighbor felt as he's caught unable to put anything before his unexpected guest.
- (2) Also, food wasn't as readily available. No 24-hour convenience stores. Bread was baked daily to meet that day's need.

The friend's response proves the desperation he feels. He decides to wake his neighbor and ask for bread. When the neighbor responds that he can't get up to give him anything, because his family is with him in bed, that's because ancient homes often only had one room, and it was common to have everyone in your family sleeping throughout that one room.

The friend's knocking would not only have been uncomfortable, but it creates a new dilemma. In a way, it passes a hot potato of hospitality. The neighbor in bed, as irritated as he might feel, is forced to ask himself: “Will I refuse showing hospitality to a neighbor in need because of the late hour?” And Jesus' point is that the neighbor WILL get up, not because of friendship, but because of the “persistence” of the request.

So, what does Jesus mean by “persistence?”

This is a fun word, because depending on your translation of the Bible, they almost all have something slightly different: persistence and boldness seem the most polite word choice, the ESV says because of his impudence, the NIV says, his “shameless audacity”...

And the reason for the difficulty in finding just the right English word is that the Greek word is combining two important qualities: boldness and shamelessness.

Well, for His highly religious audience, this is a radical teaching. The Jews have always approached God with priests and sacrifices and curtains and courtyards. Jesus has just taught them to address God as “Our Father” ...and now to come as boldly & persistently & shamelessly as this neighbor? Jesus says that it’s because of his “audacity” that he will receive whatever he needs.

And so, this leaves us with a few questions to answer:

First, why THIS particular story with the awkward neighbor to best understand how to approach God? (he could have used any example)

Why ‘shameless audacity’ and ‘persistence’ when praying? Is that respectful? And does that mean God is reluctant to respond like the neighbor who initially refuses?

And ultimately, what do we need to do with this teaching in our own prayer lives?

So, at first glance, this story can read like God might be that stubborn neighbor that only gives us what we ask when we’re really obnoxious? Is Jesus suggesting God is slow to act, like a teenager, who you have to nag a dozen times to actually do what you asked them to do?

We can dismiss this idea pretty quickly from both the text itself and other places in Scripture.

In **Luke 11:11-13**, Jesus assures his disciples that God gives the best gifts to his children. He withholds nothing good from us.

Jesus teaches in **Matthew 6:8** that: “your father knows what you need before you ask him”

**James 1:17** says that “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

And Paul says in **1 Tim 6:17** to “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”

So, God does not need to be pestered to act. Your call is very important to Him. You're not stuck in a queue that will be answered by the next available associate.

So then, if Jesus isn't comparing God to the reluctant neighbor, then there must be other reasons for teaching us to pray this way.

What if Jesus is teaching us to approach God boldly and persistently not because he's slow to act, but quite the opposite...because He's the BEST kind of Father? Because He wants the CLOSEST type of relationship with His children?

In the parable, it doesn't seem like the neighbors are especially good friends, because Jesus says, "it's NOT for friendship sake, that the neighbor will rise and give him what he needs" But, it strikes me that this is an intimate relationship because of physical closeness. First century homes are often right next to each other for a host of reasons. Jesus had JUST taught the disciples to address God in prayer as Our Father. And by proximity, the story of these neighbors suggest that God can also be addressed as someone NEAR to us.

How can you KNOW how trustworthy a relationship is? What's a REAL test? Well, much like my embarrassing story... you can ask: What am I willing to ask of that person? What is off-limits? What is too much? How comfortable are they with uncomfortable matters?

If you went to a therapist or a counselor, to evaluate the health of a marriage, or of a family...you'd look at your communication. Is it open? Honest? Is everyone able to be themselves? To express their deep needs and have them met without judgement?

**Well, let me ask you the same questions about the health of your relationship with your Heavenly Father: How open is your communication? How honest is it? Are there things you hold back, needs you don't express?**

Jesus said, "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?"

The phrase, "how much MORE SO" is so powerful and instructive! We're challenged to imagine HOW infinitely more loving, more gracious, more patient our Heavenly Father is than the best of earthly fathers...and in the same way...we should deeply consider 'how much more so' we TRULY loved children!

Martin Luther, in His small catechism, said: "God tenderly encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father, and that we are truly His children, so that we may *boldly and confidently* come to Him in prayer, even as beloved children come to their dear father."

Think for just a moment...picture in your mind...a dearly loved child...a child who from head to toe knows that they're loved. Carefree, playful, delightful,

1 John 3:1 says, "See what great love the FATHER has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

Ephesians 5:1-2 "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us..."

MY DAUGHTER BECCA when she was 8 or 9 (Tell Story)

Discomfort we felt, as she blew past some appropriate boundaries we wanted her to have for guests...but for those of you who have grandchildren that you adore...your heart loves that boldness...In the heart and mind of this 9 year old girl, she KNEW she was loved by her grandparents...in her thinking, she had unfettered access to them. And they were honored by her boldness. Climb on up, let's read stories together.

Jesus would say, "if human grandparents know how to receive their grandsons and granddaughters, how much more so...will our heavenly Father receive His beloved?"

Here's another reason Jesus uses this story: I'm convinced that God loves bold prayers

STUDY OF BOLD PRAYERS IN THE BIBLE:

Ex 33:18 - Moses is speaking with God, he essentially prays, God, if you're not coming with us, don't send us away. We need Your presence. And then, he asks for God to show him His glory. And God grants His request...a mortal, who can't be in the presence of a Holy God without dying, but God makes it possible for Moses to see God pass by.

Joshua 10:12-13 – prays that the sun would stand still, that there would be enough time to vanquish their enemies

Then in verse 14 it says, "There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!"

Or Elijah praying down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel in front of the prophets of Baal

Or the faithful request of the Centurian

Or Jairus asking for his dying daughter

Matthew Henry summarizes this principal so well. He says, *"We prevail with men by impudence because they are displeased with it, but with God because he is pleased with it."*

The very thing that annoys us and prods us into action, it delights the heart of God and prods him into action.

SOME OF YOU have prayed BOLD prayers and seen God move in miraculous ways! You've experienced first hand His miraculous provision.

But, what about when God doesn't answer our prayers or give us what we prayed for? Or we're left waiting...and don't know why.

Isn't that the greatest reason we don't approach God with boldness and persistence? Disappointment and hurt can leave us disillusioned with prayer. And with God.

Listen again and be reminded of God's heart and character in Psalm 145:14-19

"The Lord sustains all who fall  
And raises up all who are bowed down.  
<sup>15</sup> The eyes of all <sup>[a]</sup>look to You,  
And You give them their food in due time.  
<sup>16</sup> You open Your hand  
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

<sup>17</sup> The Lord is righteous in all His ways  
And kind in all His deeds.

<sup>18</sup> The Lord is near to all who call upon Him,  
To all who call upon Him in truth.

<sup>19</sup> He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him;  
He will also hear their cry and will save them."

Remember Psalm 37:4: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."

God invites us to bring unanswered prayers and our hurts and disappointments to Him...with all the faith we can muster that He will give us what we ultimately need.

**“God will either give us what we ask for in prayer or give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knows” – Tim Keller**

Silly example, but ... (CHRISTMAS PRESENTS STORY)

Jesus invites us with boldness, because the boldness assumes faith and confidence that God is not slow to act, and that He will not withhold any good thing....That confidence is crucial for prayer... listen to what John Piper teaches about this:

*You can't sustain a life of prayer if you believe God is stonewalling you or angry with you or even neutral to you. Prayer is sustained by the confidence that God is our Father and that he is concerned and that his disposition is just what Jesus says it is: he is MORE inclined to give what we need than the best human father is. That's the promise. And the direction is: pray with a sense of security in the Father's love.” – John Piper*

So, if we come to God unabashedly, with confidence, trusting Him to give the BEST gifts, trusting Him to know what is for our ULTIMATE good ...then, do we need all the asking, seeking & knocking? Why not just sit back and wait?

I think the persistent prayers must ALSO have some value for us. I’ve heard and value the saying, **“Divine commands imply needs”** IF God commands it, and he doesn’t command arbitrary things...then what is it about human beings that need that thing? What need in us does persistent prayer meet?

Persistent prayer requires me to bring it back to Him again and again. To entrust it to Him again and again. What do we gain from that repetition?

Ever had a big upcoming purchase that you purposely delayed? You wanted the emotion and the ‘impulse’ to wear off, before deciding? You wanted time to weigh the pros and the cons?

What if God wants to refine and shape the ‘desires of our heart’ in the time it may take to have our prayers answered?

Where this hits home for ME is believing and trusting that God TRULY has the best plans in my life..BETTER than the plans that I have!

Stephanie and I just recently started to teach our oldest to drive. When I was in Drivers Ed a hundred years ago, our instructor had a brake pedal on the passenger side to stop the car if needed. I’ve even heard of cars that had a secondary steering wheel to avert an accident. And to be honest...It’s probably best that I don’t have either of those things for my

daughter to truly learn. If there was a brake pedal or a second steering wheel, you can bet I'd be grabbing it from time to time, saying something like, "Let me take over for a second, I better handle this part here".

But, as crazy as that would be, the CRAZIER thing is that I do that to my Heavenly Father ALL. THE. TIME. Father, I know you only want the BEST things for me, I know that there's nothing better for me than what brings You Glory. And yet, in a hundred different ways, I grab that steering wheel all the time. I try to protect myself, and all I'm doing is protecting the SELF that needs to be crucified with Christ.

I know you're praying for unsaved family members and it hurts to think of them. You're praying for a world that you're seeing everyday going in so many wrong and hurtful directions. Your Heavenly Father understands and feels that pain with you. The reason why we pray OVER and OVER and He seems so slow to act is purposeful.

2 Peter 3:9 says that "the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Maybe you're praying for on-going health concerns or a spouse or family members that's struggling...and you say, I AM praying bold prayers. I'm waiting on an answer, and I'm not seeing it!

Persistent prayer requires me to entrust the outcome to the God who CAN heal in this life or WILL heal in the next. He stands outside of your and my entire lifetimes and even all of human history in order to answer our prayers "*as we would pray if we knew what He knows.*"

Perhaps some of us will be like Moses, or Simeon, or Anna, who will only see a glimpse of the promise being answered before our time is done. Or perhaps we'll believe like Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego that our God can save us, yet EVEN IF HE DOES NOT...we will not turn away.

We can ALL look to Jesus, who was left alone and forsaken in prayer, so that WE NEVER WOULD. The cup of suffering that Jesus prayed could pass from him, WAS NOT taken away, so that God could send His Spirit to live inside of us, to intercede for us and help us pray, until one day, we're together with Him.

So, what's heavy on your heart tonight that you can entrust boldly in prayer to Your loving Heavenly Father?