

## Practical Prayer — Luke 11:5-13 — Why Should We Pray?

**August 15, 2021**

Good morning! It is great to be together for our combined worship service called, “One Church, One Day.” It was great singing together. Now we are going to study the Word of God together before we sing some more and close with a baptism.

This summer, the pastoral team helped us study the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is a simple pattern for prayer given to us by Jesus which we can follow about how to pray and what to pray. This morning, we will finish our study on prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer is given two places in the Bible. It is found in Matthew, which is the traditional Lord’s Prayer many of us know, but a slightly shorter version of the Lord’s prayer is found in the Gospel of Luke. In the Gospel of Luke, right after giving the Lord’s Prayer, while Jesus was still teaching his disciples how to pray, he gave them a parable to learn from and a principle to follow when it comes to prayer. It is that parable and principle about prayer that Jesus taught his disciples that we are going to study this morning. Both of them answer the question, “Why should we pray?”

Have you ever felt that way? Why bother praying? Doesn’t God already know everything anyway? Why bother praying about stuff? Won’t God just do what he was already planning on doing? After all, when we pray, it is not like we are telling God things he doesn’t already know. Look at what the Bible says about how big God is and how our big God has the world and our lives mapped out from eternity past.

The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.  
Psalm 33:11 (ESV)

What God plans is fixed. We change our minds all the time. God is not like that. God's plans are not based on his mood. His plans about what will happen in this world are fixed from eternity past, from all generations.

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand. Proverbs 19:21 (ESV)

We change our plans all the time because circumstances change. God's plans and purposes don't change. Unexpected circumstances don't happen to God so he has no need to change his plans. God is large and completely in charge.

This is why the Bible's prophecy is completely reliable. For example, God told the Israelites they would be conquered by Babylon and exiled in Babylon for exactly 70 years, all before it happened. God prophetically told his people they would be set free and given a chance to return after 70 years. Just as God said, Israel was conquered and exiled by Babylon. Seventy years to the date, the Israelites were given the opportunity to return to the land of Israel.

God even prophetically told his people the name of the ruler who would free them from servitude in Babylon, even before that man was born!

...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.' " Isaiah 44:28 (ESV)

God said these things before they happened, because God has a plan for history and he is in complete control of history. That is why we know that in the end Jesus wins. God says he does! If all biblical prophecy in the past has proven

true, we have every reason to believe what God says about the future will prove true.

If that is the level of detail God has to his plans, why bother to pray? Isn't God going to do just what he has already planned to do in spite of our prayers?

In the New Testament, we see this same kind of specificity about history and how it will unfold. For example, look at the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. Acts 4:27–28 (ESV)

What a statement. Whatever they did to Jesus, it was all predetermined by God and his purposes. Jesus' crucifixion and death weren't an accident. The beating of Jesus, the miscarriage of justice at the trial of Jesus, the brutal whipping of Jesus, it was part of God's good plan, and it was all laid out from before the beginning of time. If God has such a big plan for this world and it includes the specific details of our lives and God has perfect knowledge about us and his plan for us, why bother to pray?

That is what we are going to talk about this morning. Before we get into the text, let me give you two quick answers to the question of why we pray even though God is large and in charge and has history mapped out.

The first reason we pray and give our requests, worries, and challenges to God is simply because God tells us to pray. Why would Jesus teach us how to pray in the Lord's Prayer if God didn't want us to pray? If prayer was pointless, why would Jesus teach us to pray and want us to pray? If there was no point in

praying, there would be no reason for the Bible to teach us to pray and encourage us to pray.

The next question that naturally arises is how does prayer work? If God has a big plan, how is our prayer part of that plan?

This brings us to the second reason why we pray. While God has all things under control from eternity past, he has determined that the way he will work out his plans in this world is in response to the prayers of his people. While God has all things figured out, he has determined that it is in response to the prayers of his people that he carries things out.

Just as God declared he would exile Israel in Babylon for exactly 70 years, he determined it would be in response to the prayers of his people while they were exiled in Babylon that he would release them from exile.

While God knows all there is to know about our lives, this world, and the way he will unfold his plans in this world, at the same time, he has determined to unfold his plans and purposes in this world in response to our prayers so our prayers make a difference.

That brings us to our text this morning where we learn two more reasons why we pray.

We are right after Jesus taught his disciple's the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Luke in Luke 11:5-13. Here Jesus gave his disciples a parable and principle to teach them about prayer. Let me read the text to you.

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'? 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. 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. 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? 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 11:5–13 (ESV)

### **The Parable of the Grumpy Neighbor**

Let's study the parable. This parable tells us how God feels about our prayers. God is busy running the universe. Is he inconvenienced or annoyed by us asking for insignificant needs?

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...'" Luke 11:5 (ESV)

Jesus said, suppose one of you has a friend who will go to you at midnight asking for three loaves of bread. When we read that, we think of the kind loaves of bread we purchase at the store. Three loaves of wheat bread or Wonder Bread. That is not what was happening. In this culture, a loaf of bread was a piece of flatbread. It was a small bread. Think pita bread. This is someone going to his neighbor at midnight asking for three pita breads. This is the same as three pieces of toast. It is small and seemingly insignificant. Why does he ask for three? Three pita breads dipped in olive oil or spread with fruit would be a modest meal in that part of the world.

At this time, people did not have a refrigerator. They also did not have a lot of storage. Usually they made enough bread for one day. When the bread for the day was eaten, it was gone. You also didn't have preservatives to stockpile food in the cabinet and keep bread for a week. If you had a few extra loaves of bread,

it was only kept for a day or two before it became hard. It was like buying day-old bread at Jimmy John's. It is good for one day but after that it is hard and crusty.

Remember there were no Wal-Marts or Kwik Trips open late at night so when you needed extra bread, you couldn't go to a store. It was like living in America in 1950. If you needed extra butter, flour, or shortening on a Sunday, you borrowed it from a neighbor. This is the way it worked. People were very dependent on their neighbors when they ran short on food so people shared.

What is unusual in this story, is you generally didn't go to your neighbors to ask to borrow three small pieces of bread at midnight. By midnight, most people were fast asleep. People started work around sunrise so they went to bed early. Calling on your neighbor who was a friend in the middle of the night for three small pieces of bread, three pieces of toast, was one of the fastest ways to turn your friend into an enemy. Let's see why this man knocks on his neighbor's door at midnight.

...for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him... Luke 11:6 (ESV)

Now we see the reason this man went to his friend's house at midnight. He didn't have a case of late-night munchies. He had an unexpected guest arrive at his home. The guest was tired from the trip. In that culture, if a guest came to your home, you had the social responsibility of being a good host and feeding him or her. Hospitality in Middle Eastern culture is incredibly important. If we want to understand this story, we must remember the importance of hospitality.

Unfortunately, in this case, the man wasn't prepared to offer this man even a modest meal. He had nothing in his house to feed him. They had no extra

bread. He was facing a real dilemma. Either he was going to be a bad host and send his friend to bed hungry, or he was going to be a bad neighbor and start waking neighbors up to find his guest something to eat. The only option he had was to wake his neighbor and see if he had any leftover bread.

This may not seem like a real emergency, but in Middle Eastern culture, this was a serious problem because hospitality was a serious thing.

...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 11:7 (ESV)

When I read this, I could immediately relate to this man. When I go to bed, I am out like a light. It is almost impossible to wake me up. A few years ago, when we lived in a different part of town, there was a major police event that happened near our home in the middle of the night. A drunk neighbor ended up in a fight with a police officer. When a distressed police officer called on the radio that he was in a fight and knocked down, our little block was flooded with police officers from around the Lakes area with the lights on their cars illuminating the neighborhood. This happened on a Saturday night. I had gone to bed early to be ready for church. Even though our block was filled with commotion, I slept through the whole thing. I didn't even know it happened until Monday. I read this story and I thought, this neighbor is just like me. When he is exhausted in bed he is dead to the world, just like me. No wonder the idea of getting out of bed in the middle of the night to give his neighbor what is the equivalent of three slices of bread sounded absurd. This is why he says, "Do not both me!" Go away! Give me a break!"

He says his door is shut. In that part of the world, doors were not on hinges. They were heavy pieces of wood laid in front of a door opening then bolted to the wall on all four corners. They were not easy to shut. They were not easy to open. Unbolting a door in the middle of the night was noisy. It was not easy to see because it was dark. It was heavy.

In addition, this man says his children were with him in bed. At that time, homes usually consisted of one large room. The family rolled a mat on the floor for a bed. Everyone slept together to keep warm. To get up and open the heavy door in the middle of the night would not just be a major inconvenience, it would get the children up in the middle of the night and the crying would begin. Once one child starts crying, the other children would start crying. Getting up to give this neighbor bread three pieces of toast in the middle of the night would have been a major inconvenience, a complete disaster.

So even though this person is a neighbor and a friend, he is not excited about getting up in the middle of the night. He is a grumpy neighbor. He initially tells his friend to go away. He doesn't want to be inconvenienced. Now the story takes a strange twist.

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 (ESV)

Close friendship was not enough to get this man out of bed. Impudence was enough to get this man out of bed and give his neighbor everything he needs. Everything turns around this word impudence. The problem is most of us don't even know what impudence means. Let's see what we can learn.

Impudence means recklessness, rudeness or shamelessness.

It seems to say that because of his neighbor's rudeness, this neighbor will give him all the bread he needs. Is this story teaching us to bring rude requests to God?

The Greek word behind it is also interesting. It is the word *anadeia*. It only occurs one time in the Bible, that is in this verse. It is hard to translate. It deals with acting shamelessly, rudely or recklessly or it can mean trying to avoid shame. If you translate the Greek word *anadeia* in a negative sense, it means acting rudely or shamefully or trying to avoid acting rudely or shamefully. If you translate this Greek word in a positive sense, it means acting with boldness or persistence.

In church history, in the Middle Ages, some Bible translators were not sure how to translate this Greek word so they started translating this word in this context positively even though it was traditionally translated negatively.

This resulted in some Bible translations coming to us saying that it is because of this man's boldness or persistence that his neighbor will give him all the bread he needs. The application for us is we must be bold and persistent in our prayer for God to answer our prayers.

There is a problem. I did a lot of research on this passage. What I learned is that for the first 500 years of church history, in all of Greek literature, we have no case of the word *anadeia* being used in its positive sense. It was never used to mean boldness or persistence. It always carried a negative sense of dealing with displaying shame or avoiding shame.

This word must mean either displaying or avoiding shame.

Where do we go from here? In the NIV translation of this verse, there is a footnote that I believe solves this riddle. This footnote was added to reflect the best theological journals I could find on this verse. This verse is not talking about the man who goes to his neighbor in the middle of the night displaying shame. It is talking about the neighbor in bed getting up in the middle of the night, disturbing his sleep, waking his children, opening the door to avoid shame, the shame of being inhospitable and not helping his neighbor in his time of need. Turning his neighbor away in his time of need would have destroyed his reputation in the community. He helps his neighbor not because he wants to but because he has to. He helps him begrudgingly, not cheerfully.

Here is how the footnote in the NIV translates this verse.

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, (yet to preserve his good name) he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. Luke 11:8 (NIV alternate translation from footnote)

The only reason he helps him is not because he cares about him but to avoid tarnishing his own reputation in the community.

What is this parable teaching us? This is not a parable of similarity. It is a parable of contrast. Our God is not like a grumpy friend in the middle of the night who only answers our prayers and provides for our needs because he has to in order to keep up his reputation but not because he actually cares about us. That is not our God. When we come to God in our times of need, it doesn't matter if it is midnight. It doesn't matter what is happening. It doesn't matter how small the need, our God is not asleep. He is eager to hear from us. He is eager to answer us. He is eager to help us and to provide what we need. He is never

inconvenienced when we call out to him in our times of need. He is always delighted to respond. Our God is not like a grumpy neighbor.

Even though our God is orbiting the planets, he is not inconvenienced in the slightest when we come to him with our small worries and little needs, even if it is just for a few pieces of bread.

There is no such thing as a bad time to pray to our God. There is no such thing as a request that is too small for God. God never respond to our prayers and needs begrudgingly. He always responds cheerfully and eagerly.

This is why the next thing Jesus says is that we should be eager to pray and confident that when we come to God with our needs, he will answer and provide for our needs.

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 (ESV)

Jesus tells us to ask God for things in prayer. He will give us what we need. Seek things we need from God, and we will find them. Knock, and God will open doors for us. Interestingly, ask, seek, and knock are all in the Greek present tense, which means we are to be continually asking God for what we need. We are to be continually seeking God for what we need, knowing God will answer. Keep knocking, and God will open doors.

I like the way James says it.

...You do not have, because you do not ask. James 4:2 (ESV)

So the first thing we need to remember from this parable is how God feels about our prayers. He wants us to pray about all our needs. He is eager to respond to our needs. He is not inconvenienced by us. He loves us.

The question then becomes, if God loves me and is eager to answer our prayers, why doesn't God answer my prayers more frequently? Why does it feel like God sometimes ignores my prayers even though we just learned that God is eager to hear and answer our prayers. The next three verses give us the answer as Jesus moves from a parable on prayer to a principle on prayer.

### **The Principle of the Loving Father**

**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 (ESV)**

Jesus talked about fathers. Who of us are fathers this morning. Raise your hands. All of us who are fathers know how much we love our children. As dads, we will do anything for our children. We would never give our children anything that would hurt them or be harmful to them. If one of my sons was at the pet store and he wanted a goldfish, I would not give him a deadly pit viper for his room instead of a goldfish. If my children wanted scrambled eggs for breakfast, I wouldn't give them a live scorpion. I love my children. I only give my children what is best for them. The principle is pretty simple.

**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 (ESV)**

The point is simple. If fallen fathers who can be selfish and proud know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will God, who is our heavenly father, and who is holy, pure, wise, and loves us much more than our earthly fathers ever could, give good gifts to those who ask him? When God answers our prayers, he will always answer our prayers in a way that is best for us and with timing that is right for us so we are able to bring more glory to God.

How many fathers remember your children asking for things they desperately wanted but because you are a good and loving father, you couldn't give your children what they wanted?

This past week, I was talking with my middle son on the phone. We were laughing about how much he wanted a motorcycle as a child. One Christmas, that is all he wanted. At the time we lived in a subdivision with a small yard and lots of neighbors. My son pictured himself racing with knobby tires across the fertilized lawn, racing up and down the road and across neighbor's yards. In addition to being illegal and destroying lawns, I am not sure if my son would have lived long enough to see his next birthday since he was such a daredevil. As a father, because I love him, I couldn't get him a motorcycle for Christmas. He didn't understand why I wouldn't get him one. He disagreed with me, but he had to listen to me.

It is the same with our heavenly father. He loves us. He knows what is good for us. He knows what is best for us. He knows what will help us bring more glory to God. When he does answer our prayers, he knows the right timing for those answers. When he doesn't answer our prayers, he has a good reason. When we pray and God doesn't answer our prayers, it is not because he doesn't love us. It is because he does love us. He knows what is best for us.

In addition, just as a good father sometimes puts his children through hard times because he knows what is best for them. God sometimes puts us through difficult times. Sometimes he does not answer our prayers for release from difficulties but that is only because he has a better plan.

This is like Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt. He prayed for release but God didn't give him release. He was sold as a slave. He was falsely accused of rape. It was years of feeling like God forgot him until in one day God took him from the dungeon room to the throne room in Egypt. Then he understood why God didn't answer his earlier plans. God had a better plan.

We see this truth with Jesus as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. There he prayed, "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but your will be done." In other words, Jesus was not real excited about dying on a cross. It was sort of painful. He was not excited about becoming sin. He was not excited about the whipping and beating, but he knew it was best to submit to God the Father's plans because if God the Father wanted Jesus to go to the cross, it was because he had a better plan, not a worse plan. The same is true for us. If God doesn't answer our prayers for release from a trial or a difficulty, it is because God has a better plan, a better way for us to bring him glory, not a worse plan or way to bring him glory.

As we continue in the principle of the loving father, we find God will sometimes answer our prayers with what is best for us, but it may not be what we expect.

In Matthew we find this same story and it ends with these words.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, [how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!](#)  
Matthew 7:11 (ESV)

That is the same principle we find in Luke, but there is an unexpected twist in Luke that we don't find in Matthew.

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 (ESV)

While Matthew ends by Jesus saying God the Father will give good things to those who ask. Luke ends the story saying God the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

At first it, it sounds like people in Luke were ripped off. Instead of getting good gifts from God, they just get the Holy Spirit. I wish I had good gifts. If you think about it, it is just the opposite. The Holy Spirit is the best good gift God can give us.

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Godhead living inside of us. The Holy Spirit is the one who makes us into new creations. The Holy Spirit guides us to the truth. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. The Holy Spirit leads us to repentance. The Holy Spirit draws us to God. The Holy Spirit gifts us to serve. The Holy Spirit comforts us in our troubles. Every good thing we have is a gift from the Holy Spirit. What better gift could God give us than the Holy Spirit? We may not ask for the Holy Spirit but God gives us better than what we ask because he is a good father.

## **Conclusion**

This morning, we learned reasons why we pray.

1. We pray because God tells us to pray. If it was pointless to pray, why would God the Father and Jesus tell us to pray?
2. We pray because even though God knows everything, he carries out his plans in this world in response to the prayers of his people in this world.

3. We pray because God is not a grumpy neighbor who is bothered by our small requests. God loves us. He wants us asking for all our needs.
4. We pray because our God is a loving father. He answers our prayers in a way that is best for us with a timing that is right for us to help us bring more glory to God. When it comes to prayer, even though God is large and in charge and he has a big plan, our prayers still matter. God has planned to bring about his good plan in this world through the prayers of his people, not without the prayers of his people. This is why we can be confident God will answer our prayers.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at [www.Christ2RCulture.com](http://www.Christ2RCulture.com) ([www.c2rc.com](http://www.c2rc.com))

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