

Learning to Pray
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I was blessed to have a number of high school buddies go to the same college as me my first year out of high school. I roomed with one of my best friends, Corey. Two more of our buddies lived together in the very same dorm on the same floor as us - 4th floor, Pierson. And we had other guys and gals from our little posse who attended SDSU, too. One of my friends down the hall, Jeff, was an interesting dude. He was kind of like Kramer from Seinfeld. A great friend, really quirky, and would do the strangest things sometimes. To put it bluntly, he'd wear out of his welcome; even really good friends can do that. I remember one time coming home from a class and finding Jeff in my dorm room (I'm really not sure how he got in there). But he wasn't just in my room, he was in my room in his underwear and robe clipping his toenails. Now look, I loved my friends, but I said to him while dodging toenails flying through the air, "Gerdes! Get the heck out of here!" Even friendship has its limits.

As Jesus continues his teaching today on prayer, he uses the example of friendship as a teaching analogy. But he's not trying to teach us something about friendship; instead, he's trying to teach us while friendship has its limits, faithful, gutsy faith in God pushes past similar limits in prayer. Let's read Jesus' teaching and learn some more (READ Luke 11:5-11).

Prayer is a practice of audacity. It might seem or feel that good sense should convince us not to pray. What might some of those reasons be?

- God's too busy ~ "God's running the universe; North Korea is making nuclear weapons; there are hurricanes in the Caribbean and earthquakes in Mexico. God's too busy to concern himself with little 'ole me." God is just too busy. Of course, an infinite God is never *too busy*. God doesn't have a schedule that gets too full. But there are a lot of things happening in the world; does God have time for me?
- God will do what he wants to do anyway ~ The Bible is filled - filled, friends - with evidence that this is exactly true. God will do what pleases him and nobody can stop him. Listen to some of these verses
 - Ps. 33:11 - The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.
 - Pr. 19:21 - Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.
 - Is. 14:24 - The Lord of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand."

You're not wrong thinking God will always accomplish his purposes no matter what you do. But this truth can wrongly keep people from praying. I'll explain in a minute.

- Who am I to ask God for anything? - Again, this isn't a wrong intuition. Certainly, it can be held, stated, and believed in a prideful, self-pity way. Do you know what I mean by that? Sometimes, when someone says or when we say, "Well, I'm just not very important," we are really protesting and saying, "I *AM* important! Start paying attention." But the scriptures do say we are dust; in comparison to the grand scheme of the cosmos and the Kingdom of God, in comparison to the

grandeur and greatness of God, we really are small and insignificant. And some, when they rightly see and understand this truth, wrongly think God doesn't care to hear their prayers.

Prayer is the audacity to look at all of these reasons, that God is doing significant things in the universe (more significant than my little life), that God will accomplish his eternal purposes no matter what I do, and that we are small ... and boldly pray to God anyway.

Now, why would we do that? Answer: because God tells us to. We're supposed to. That's what he teaches us. And true faith takes God at his word even when it seems to not be right. This passage of scripture teaches prayer is boldly approaching the Lord.

Jesus' explains this by telling a story or an analogy. And it's comical; it reminds me of my cheeky friend clipping his toenails in my room. Even then, while I was grossed out, it made me laugh. It was one of those Kramer-moments. Jesus' story, most certainly fictitious, is believable. In 1st century Palestine where there were no 24 hour grocery stores and where people would travel at night to avoid the heat of the day, it's quite plausible to imagine a friend showing up at your doorstep in the middle of the night needing some help. And also, hospitality was a cultural duty. You didn't turn away traveling friends or even strangers. So a friend stops in the middle of the night and you're unprepared to be a good host. So, what do you do? You go to your friend, your neighbor and say, "Hey, help me out, will you! Here's what's happening."

I love how Jesus says in the story in vs. 7, "and he (the sleeping friend) *will* answer from within, 'Do not bother me.'" Do you know why that's significant? Jesus isn't trying to condemn a tired, sleeping friend already turned in for the night. He's saying, "it would be normal for a friend to say, 'Hey, clip your toenails in your own room!'" One of commentators I use in my study of Luke spent pages talking about how Jesus' story is condemnation of the sleeping friend and how nobody would be such a bad friend. When I read his notes I did a double take; I thought to myself, "Did I miss read this story?" Of course, this gentleman is the expert, right? Some lowly pastor in Medford, WI, couldn't be right, could he? So, I read the passage again and his notes again and have come to the conclusion that this usually trustworthy Bible scholar is just wrong. Jesus isn't trying to encourage us to pray by telling us that God is a better friend than the man in Jesus' story. He's trying to teach us something else. Read the scriptures, my good friend, and prayerful think. Yes, use trusted sources, but sometimes they are wrong. Think for yourself; read something several times to make sure you understand like you should.

There are all kinds of reasons why the friend says, "Come back in the morning; don't bother me now."

- My door is shut - this might sound like a silly reason for us who open a door by turning a knob, but in the 1st century, doors were for security and each night a homeowner would go through a long routine of bolting a door closed.
- My children are with me in bed - I remember in those early years when we had little ones Korby and I worked so hard to make sure there would be nothing to wake our babies when they were asleep, right? Because once they are up they're up for a while.

Vs. 8 tells us the conclusion to the story and how to get your friend out of his bed. "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." Look what Jesus is saying: he won't get up because of his friendship. Friendship has some normal, natural limits. So, why did he get up? It says "because of his impudence." What's that? What's *impudence*? Impudence is not giving a man the respect he's asking for; it's having a rude imposition.

In the old KJV the word there is translated *importunity*. Have you ever heard that word before? I admit I don't use that word much. It sounds a lot like *opportunity*. Opportunity means to take advantage of a favorable situation, right? Imagine Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook taking a tour of Athens High School and while he's there he shares some life lessons with some science classes and how to get into computer programming. What a great opportunity! Importunity is the opposite of that. It means to act when the situation does not look favorable.

When I was a Jr. high or Sr. high student (can't remember) we had a youth group scavenger hunt. We were given a list of silly things to do around town and be the first one back to the church. One of the items to do was find a police officer and try to convince them that we've seen a UFO. So, here we were, a group of about 6 of us wondering, "Where in the world will find a police officer to tell our tale." One of us spotted a patrol car; so, I'm sure, we did an illegal Uturn and we parked near his squad car along a side street. Several officers were talking to another man, a civilian. So, we get out of the car and timidly start walking up to the situation wondering who was going to have the guts to bring up UFOs. We waited because they were preoccupied in conversation. But I remember one of them was more or less just watching so I thought, let's just talk to him. As soon as we were about to open up our mouths, the civilian took off like a jackrabbit with the the officers responding quickly in hot pursuit calling for a back up. And I remember thinking in obvious fashion, "This doesn't seem to be a good time."

Importunity. Wrong time. Wrong place. Wrong way. The man won't get up because he's your friend. But he will get up because of your importunity, because of your impudence. Because you'd be so bold, so audacious, so brazen to ask in the middle of the night and not go away, he will get up to help. Some translations use the word *persistence*. So the idea is if you keep being persistent in prayer it's going to pay off. That's not entirely wrong, but the idea that Jesus is teaching us is not that we would merely persist in our prayers; he's encouraging a boldness in prayer. He's encouraging a kind of prayer, a kind of asking, that seems a little out of place.

There's a saying that goes "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." That's taken from a 18th century poem by Alexander Pope. That's the idea that Jesus is encouraging. Prayer is a tad foolish. It's a tad presumptuous. Who do we think we are? Why would we think God would care about what's happening in our little lives? Aren't there more important things going on in the world?

Please understand what Jesus is teaching (he's teaching this - he's telling us this is what we are supposed to do). Jesus is teaching that while there might be all of these reasons not to pray, just like there are all kinds of reasons why a friend might not answer the door in the middle of the night, do it anyway. Be so bold, be so gutsy in the face of all kinds of obstacles and pray anyway. There is an

effectiveness, there is a fruitfulness to boldly praying in the face of obstacles and excuses. That's the kinds of prayers God answers.

Do you know why? I think it has to do with faith. To look at all kinds of reasons and excuses not to pray, to doubt if my prayers are going to work or are even welcome, and pray anyway is evidence of a kind of faith that makes God happy. But where does that kind of faith come from? It comes from an absolute conviction that Jesus told us to do it. Because he taught us to pray boldly in Luke 11. That's faith, friends. Faith is not believing for no good reason; faith is not wishing upon a star just because I feel good about the outcome. That's what faith is to so many people. You'll look up in the stands at a football game with a homer holding up a sign that says, "Just believe" like that's all it takes. No, faith is believing in what God said we should do. He said I should pray. He told me I should be bold. Jesus taught that even though there are all kinds of seemingly good reasons why my prayers wouldn't be answered, pray anyway. So, because of his word, because of his teaching, I will pray with importunity.

That's where he goes in vs. 9-10; let's read those (READ). Ask, FBC! That's what Jesus, your Master Teacher is telling you. Are you going to be like Mary who humbly sat at Jesus' feet and said, "Teach me how to follow you. Teach me how to live your way?" Are we going to be his disciples and obey his teachings or not? That's the bottom line.

Jesus tells us there will be an outcome in vs. 10. If you ask, you will receive. If you seek, you will find. If you knock, the door will be opened. Those are strong words, right? Jesus is really trying to convince us, his followers, to trust in him.

I know some of you are thinking, "Forget it, Brian. I have been praying for years - even decades - and God has not answered, I have not found, the door has not been opened. I'm not praying anymore." I understand, my friends. I understand your weariness; I understand your hopelessness. But don't give up on being taught by Jesus. There's more to learn. There's more to learn about him. There's more to learn about you. Don't look at the silence of God in your life and conclude that what God has said in his word right here in Luke 11 is wrong. Conclude that you don't understand like you need to understand. Conclude that there is more growth that you need to experience. And would you be so humble to conclude that God isn't the one mistaken, but you are. I say this, friends, to help you, not to hurt you.

Next week we will learn about the character of our God that would keep us praying in the face of impossible odds. And also we will learn about the character of God that will keep us trusting him when we don't see the results that we'd like to see when we do boldly pray like he's taught us to pray today.

Key vs. ~ Luke 11:8

Questions for the week

- What are some reasons that you have that keeps you from praying?
- What was the most helpful/challenging word from the message this morning?
- What will you do differently because of what you heard this morning?